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Melanchthon's Authorizing of Luther:

An Examination of the Narrative Origins of
Sixteenth-Century Historical Life-writing.

1 Volume

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Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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2013

Melanchthon's Authorizing of Luther: An Examination of the Narrative Origins of Sixteenth-Century Historical Life-Writing.

For many, the Reformation schism from the Roman Church represented a heretical act and a break from an institution with a well-established historical understanding of itself. Early Protestants developed a representation of their history in sophisticated narratives that justified their action and countered the charges of heresy levelled at them; fledgling Protestant history argued its theological orthodoxy by presenting its break from the abuses of the past as a return to the ancient Church's purity. These narratives indicate that the self-perception of the movements was tied closely to their major proponents; as such, the histories of these few individuals became crucial to an understanding of the movements themselves, and the diverse narrative forms, adopted by sixteenth-century Protestants in numerous chronicles, biographies, hagiographies and sermons relating to Luther's life, clearly show the quest for a suitable narrative form to make sense of the Reformation. Through an examination of a largely neglected master text of the *Lutherbild*, Melanchthon's *Historia de vita et actis Reverendiss. viri D. Mart. Lutheri* (Erfurt: Gervasius Stürmer, 1548), this thesis identifies the nature of the narrative models used to represent Luther, and thereby recreates the historical consciousness of his first biographer. Given the 'good' Catholic backgrounds of the first reformers along with the need to justify the orthodoxy of the Reformation, this analysis shows how the historical consciousness present in early histories demonstrates an orthodoxy and inheritance from well-established narrative models to represent the leaders of Protestantism. Simultaneously, this analysis indicates how in adopting various aspects of the life-writing tradition and through careful selection, Melanchthon establishes an authorized and distinctly Wittenberg image of Luther that has dictated the subsequent understanding of the man and his movement, and that a clearly individual-based and biographical approach has in fact shaped the self-image and understanding of history.

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List of Abbreviations

| | |
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| <i>ADB</i> | <i>Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie</i> |
| <i>ARG</i> | <i>Archiv für Refomationsgeschichte</i> |
| <i>CMG</i> | <i>Corpus medicorum Graecorum</i> |
| <i>CR</i> | <i>Corpus Reformatorum: Philippi Melanthonis opera quae supersunt omnia</i> |
| <i>CWE</i> | <i>Collected Works of Erasmus</i> |
| <i>JMH</i> | <i>The Journal of Modern History</i> |
| <i>MSA</i> | <i>Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl [Studienausgabe]</i> |
| <i>VD16</i> | <i>Verzeichnis der im deutschen Sprachbereich erschienen Drucke des XVI. Jahrhunderts</i> |
| <i>WA</i> | <i>Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Weimarer Ausgabe)</i> |
| <i>WABr.</i> | <i>Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Weimarer Ausgabe), Briefe</i> |
| <i>WATr.</i> | <i>Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Weimarer Ausgabe), Tischreden</i> |
| <i>WUNT</i> | <i>Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament</i> |

DECLARATION

This is to attest that no material from this thesis has been included in any work submitted for examination at this or any other university.

Statement of Copyright

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Acknowledgements

No text is ever produced in isolation, and the undertaking of this thesis would not have been possible without the assistance and support of others at various stages of its production.

In the first instance, I am indebted to my supervisor, Dr Peter Macardle, who first introduced me to the complexities of Luther's image; it is a testament to his enthusiasm and knowledge that having joined his final-year course as a last-minute substitution, I have pursued questions first raised in undergraduate tutorials in both my M.A. and Ph.D. theses. Throughout the last eighteen years, he has offered constant help and guidance, as well as pedantic proof-reading skills; his expert interest and opinion have been freely given and fully appreciated. That he showed unfailing understanding of the difficulties of combining part-time research and full-time employment is witness to his patience and generosity, and I consider myself privileged to have worked with him.

During early stages of research, I was helped by academics in the United Kingdom, Germany, and the United States. Their suggestions introduced me to a much wider circle of scholars working in the field and provided invaluable stimulation, and I offer my thanks to all.

Through its various reincarnations and reinventions, The School of Modern Languages and Cultures at the University of Durham has waited patiently for me to complete, and I am grateful for the insight and suggestions of those who viewed my work in earlier forms; for their perceptive and helpful comments, I thank Dr Kathryn Banks, Dr Marie-Claire Barnet, Dr Andrew Beresford, Professor Lucille Cairns, Professor Carlo Caruso, Professor Jan Clarke, Professor David Cowling, Professor Mikhail Epstein, Professor Jonathan Long, Professor Andrea Noble, Dr Neil Thomas, and Dr Edward Welch. More recently, Dr Claudia Nitschke has offered much needed support and encouragement, as well as a cheerful insistence that the thesis must be submitted by the deadline.

Finally, I thank my wife, Emma, for her tolerance in allowing me to embark on this project and her unstinting help during its completion.

Chapter One:

Introduction



1. Topic

For the earliest witnesses and participants in the Reformation, the schism with the Roman Church represented not only a heretical act but also a break from an institution with a well-established historical understanding of itself and its authority. Therefore, sixteenth-century Protestants developed a highly historical representation of their movements in sophisticated narratives that sought to justify their course of action and counter the charges of heresy and innovation levelled at them by the Roman Catholic Church; fledgling Protestant history argues its theological orthodoxy by presenting its break from the abuses of the past as a return to the purity of the ancient Church. These narratives often indicate that the self-perception of the various movements in this period was tied closely to their major proponents; as such the histories of these few individuals became crucial to an understanding of the various movements themselves, and the diverse narrative forms, adopted by sixteenth-century Protestants in numerous chronicles, biographies, hagiographies and sermons clearly show the quest for a suitable narrative form to make sense of the Reformation and its leading figure.

Within the German-speaking world, Martin Luther's life is synonymous with the Reformation; he stands as one of the most-written-about Germans in history whose image has been repeatedly used, both positively and negatively, to support two distinct confessional arguments. From the early-modern period onwards, Luther's life and acts have generated a vast corpus of literature including biographies, theological treatises, church histories, tour guides, recipe books, and so on. Throughout the last five hundred years, his image has been subjected to narrative spin, and yet each version of Luther's life is bound to essential facts, ultimately generated by one biography of the Reformer.

Through an examination of a largely neglected master text of the *Lutherbild*, Melanchthon's *Historia de vita et actis Reverendiss. viri D. Mart. Lutheri*,¹ this thesis will identify the nature of the narrative models used to represent the major figure of the Reformation in the earliest full life of Luther, and thereby recreate the historical consciousness of sixteenth-century Protestant biographers. By comparing Melanchthon's depiction of Luther with that of his representation by other contemporary and subsequent biographers, the thesis will demonstrate the close parallels that exist not only in the narrative forms adopted by these groups but also in their shared historical consciousness and the influence of Melanchthon's authoring of Luther's image which has endured over time. Given the 'good' Catholic backgrounds of the first reformers along with the need to justify the orthodoxy of the Reformation, this analysis will show how the historical consciousness present in this early history demonstrates an orthodoxy and inheritance from well-established narrative models to represent the leaders of the Lutheran movement. Simultaneously, this analysis will indicate how in adopting various aspects of the life-writing tradition and through careful selection, Melanchthon established an authorized and distinctly Wittenberg image of Luther that has dictated the subsequent understanding of the man and his movement. Finally, despite the distinctly historically influenced arguments of early Protestant theology, this thesis will show that a clearly

¹ In its first incarnation, the text appears as the preface to the second volume of Luther's collected works; see Philipp Melanchthon, 'Praefatio', in Martin Luther, *Opera omnia*, ed. by Philipp Melanchthon (Wittenberg: Johannes Lufft, 1546), II. This 1546 text is reproduced in *Corpus Reformatorum: Philippi Melanthonis opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. by K. G. Bretschneider and H. E. Bindseil, 28 vols (Halle: Schwetschke, 1834-60), VI, 155-170. All references to the text refer, however, to the 1548 first-edition quarto; see Philipp Melanchthon, *Historia de vita et actis Reverendiss. viri D. Mart. Lutheri* (Erfurt: Gervasius Stürmer, 1548); this is available on-line at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek <<http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb00072478-9>> [last accessed on 12 August 2013].

individual-based and biographical approach has in fact shaped the self-image and understanding of history by one such group.

2. Melanchthon

Born in 1497 in Bretten the son of an armourer to the court of Heidelberg, Philipp Schwarzerdt attended the Latin school in Pforzheim from 1507; from this period onwards, he came under the influence of his great-uncle, the humanist Johannes Reuchlin who encouraged the young Philipp to change his surname to its Greek equivalent Μελάγχθων or Melanchthon, a custom usual among humanists of that time. In 1509, Melanchthon matriculated at the University of Heidelberg but left for Tübingen in 1512 having been refused the degree of master on account of his youth and to be closer to Reuchlin. Awarded MA in 1514, Melanchthon taught rhetoric and dialectic while turning his attention to theology; under the influence of Reuchlin and Erasmus, Melanchthon became convinced that Christianity was something different from scholastic theology and quickly identified himself as a reformer. Following the recommendation of Reuchlin, the now twenty-one year old Melanchthon accepted a professorship of Greek at the still fledgling University of Wittenberg in 1518.

Melanchthon's talent as a Hellenist would of course be put to good use in Wittenberg; barely a year after the posting of the Ninety Five Theses, Luther sought Melanchthon's support in clarifying the meaning of certain passages in Paul's epistles, and Melanchthon offered his teaching and humanist services to the new religious movement. His works in this period demonstrate a careful study of the early Christian canon, with lectures on the Pauline epistles, commentaries on Romans and Colossians, and courses on John and Matthew. 1521 saw the publication of arguably Melanchthon's most significant work, the *Loci communes*,² a comprehensive treatment of the theological positions recognized from the evangelical perspective.

The following years saw Melanchthon's rôle increase from that of a university professor to a more practical, engaged involvement in Church and political affairs; alongside his visitation protocols for parishes, Melanchthon's energies focused on the development of German education, earning him the title of *Præceptor Germaniæ*, a title which only vaguely suggests the connections between

² Philipp Melanchthon, *Loci communes* (Wittenberg: Melchior Lotter, 1521); the *Loci* are also to be found in *Corpus Reformatorum* [hereafter CR], ed. by K. G. Bretschneider and Heinrich Bindseil (Halle: Schwetschke, 1834-), XXI, p. 82 & ff.

his views of education, culture, and humanism, all underpinned by his theological programme.³ In 1530, Melanchthon presented the Confession at the Diet of Augsburg, a comprehensive statement of Wittenberg theology which consolidated the Protestant movement. Melanchthon's embrace of his public disputational rôle helped shape, somewhat inaccurately, his reputation as a reluctant participant committed to irenicism.⁴

On Luther's death, Melanchthon assumed charge of the Wittenberg party and entered a series of disputes within the Lutheran movement that tested him severely. His decisions regarding the Augsburg and Leipzig Interims led to a schism within the Lutheran movement, creating the Philippist and the Gnesio-Lutheran factions, and the feuding continued throughout the final decade of Melanchthon's life. Despite the tumult, Melanchthon remained a committed defender of the doctrines that he had established with Luther, and following his death on the 1 April 1560, he was given a funeral to equal Luther's and buried opposite his friend in the Wittenberg Castle Church.⁵

Melanchthon's life was shaped and influenced by his relationship with Luther, in whom the latter found his 'best[en] Verteidiger und Mitstreiter';⁶ his achievements were attained in the name of the Lutheran movement and the Reformation, and he functioned as Luther's greatest ally. The close collaboration of the two over almost thirty years made Melanchthon the 'ideal custodian of Luther's legacy' and the author of one of the most significant biographies of his friend.⁷

³ See Karl Hartfelder, *Philipp Melanchthon als Præceptor Germaniæ* (Berlin: A. Hofmann, 1898).

⁴ See Peter Fraenkel and Martin Greschat, *Zwanzig Jahre Melanchthonstudium: sechs Literaturberichte*, *Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 43 (Zurich: Droz, 1967), esp. 125-37. See also Heinz Scheible, *Melanchthon und die Reformation: Forschungsbeiträge*, ed. by G. May and R. Decot, *Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte*, 41 (Mainz: von Zabern, 1996).

⁵ For further information on Melanchthon's life, see Robert Stupperich, 'Philipp Melanchthon', in *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 16 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1953; 1990), pp. 741-745, available on-line at: <<http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd118580485.html>> [accessed on 12 July 2013]. See also Wilhelm Mauer, *Der junge Melanchthon zwischen Humanismus und Reformation*, 2 vols (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967-69; 1 vol. reprint 1996).

⁶ Harald Weinacht, *Melanchthon und Luther: Martin Luthers Lebensbeschreibung durch Philipp Melanchthon* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2008), p. 169.

⁷ Ralph Keen, 'Philip Melanchthon and the historical Luther', in Elizabeth Vandiver, Ralph Keen, and Thomas D. Frazel, *Luther's Lives: Two Contemporary Accounts of Martin Luther* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. P., 2002), p. 12.

3. Melanchthon's *Historia*

Immediately following Luther's death in February 1546, the desire to describe and commemorate his life and works arose, and his long-serving friend and collaborator was ideally suited to the rôle of biographer. Melanchthon's first contribution to this act of memory was his funeral oration for Luther, written in three days and delivered in the Castle Church in Wittenberg on the 22 February, which was quickly published in both Latin and German.⁸ A collection of Luther's major works followed, in which the *Historia* was initially intended as a preface to the second volume,⁹ but the demand for a life of the reformer was such that it was soon to appear in its own quarto edition.

As a consequence of the *Historia*'s presence as a preface to the collected works and its inclusion in Melanchthon's *Selectarum Declamationum*,¹⁰ the text gained rapid popularity and underwent over seventeen stand-alone quarto editions in the sixteenth century to become in effect a paperback bestseller;¹¹ its popularity continued to be seen after 1600 and its repeated print-runs lasted well into the nineteenth century. Initially published in Latin, the *Historia* penetrated fully the international scene, gaining a readership among Swiss Calvinists as well as large sections appearing in a translated form in Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*;¹² the text

⁸ Philip Melanchthon, *Oratio in funere viri reverendi D. Martini Lutheri* (Wittenberg: Rhau, 1546), in *CR*, 11, 726-734.

⁹ Martin Luther, *Tomus Secundus Omnium Operum Reverendi Domini Martini Lutheri* (Wittenberg: Johannes Lufft, 1546).

¹⁰ Philipp Melanchthon, *Selectarum Declamationum*, 3 vols (Strasburg: Samuel Emmel, 1558-59), pp. 496-519.

¹¹ It enjoyed a good print run as is shown by the number of editions it received within the sixteenth century and the widespread availability of copies today; a search of the *VD16* database reveals that Melanchthon's *Historia* was published in at least ten editions between 1548 and 1562 in both Latin and German, and that a large number of editions are readily available both in Germany and other countries today, suggesting that the work was sufficiently popular to enjoy so many editions and to survive in so many libraries. See also Harald Weinacht, *Melanchthon und Luther: Martin Luthers Lebensbeschreibung durch Philipp Melanchthon* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2008), p. 162, note 2. See also *CR*, 20, 430-438 for a detailed survey of editions of the *Historia*.

¹² John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments* (London: John Day, 1563). Melanchthon's pamphlet was translated in 1561 by Henry Bennet whose version was subsequently adopted by John Foxe for the *Memorials* without any revision, as indicated by the presence of Bennet's translation errors in Foxe's text. This ensured that Melanchthon's life became the official biography for Elizabethan England as, from 1571, all cathedrals and senior clergy were required to keep a copy of the second edition of Foxe's *Acts* following an act of the Upper House of Convocation while archepiscopal instruction required all parish churches to retain a copy. For further information on Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* and its status in the sixteenth-century, see J. F. Mozley, *John Foxe and his Book* (New York: McMillan, 1940), p. 147.

thus became the official Wittenberg history of Luther to the Protestant community. More recently, the text has been translated into German and English.¹³

As one of only ‘two substantial eyewitness accounts’ of Luther,¹⁴ and the only Lutheran account, the text assumes an even greater significance in the development of the Protestant understanding of Luther’s life. Nevertheless, the scholarly reception of the work has been curious; on the one hand, the text is approached with caution and is not regarded as a ‘satisfying compendium of Luther’s life’;¹⁵ however, this caution is not mirrored in the way in which many of its factual details and narrativisation have been adopted for the last five hundred years.

This thesis will concentrate on this curiously neglected text that has been fully incorporated into the historical understanding of the Reformation since the sixteenth century. Inadequate scholarship and inadequate methodology have allowed the text to go unexamined and achieve canonical status. For many, Melanchthon’s text is simply self-evident in its straightforward telling of Luther’s life; this reception has been reflected in the adoption of much of the text’s contents and form so that Melanchthon’s life dominates, at least indirectly, all subsequent lives of Luther. Melanchthon has become the evangelist to Luther’s Christ with his gospel assuming compelling power that goes unquestioned; to further the analogy, this study will show how Melanchthon’s gospel has shaped all understanding of the *passio Martini Lutheri*, and recalls Melanchthon’s words on Luther’s death.¹⁶

¹³ See Harald Weinacht, *Melanchthon und Luther: Martin Luthers Lebensbeschreibung durch Philipp Melanchthon* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2008), and Elizabeth Vandiver, Ralph Keen, and Thomas D. Fazel, *Luther’s Lives: Two Contemporary Accounts of Martin Luther* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. P., 2002).

¹⁴ Elizabeth Vandiver, Ralph Keen, and Thomas D. Fazel, ‘Introduction’, in *Luther’s Lives: Two Contemporary Accounts of Martin Luther* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. P., 2002; 2003), pp. 1-5 (p. 1).

¹⁵ Susan C. Karant-Nunn, review of Harald Weinacht’s *Melanchthon und Luther: Merkmale einer Kirchenreform: Martin Luthers Lebensbeschreibung durch Philipp Melanchthon*, *JEH*, 60 (3) (1999), 599.

¹⁶ Selnecker identifies the parallel between Melanchthon following Luther as Elisha followed Elijah; on hearing of Luther’s death, Melanchthon informed his audience in tears that the great charioteer has fallen with the chariot of Israel, recalling 2 Kings 13. 14. See Nicolaus Selnecker, *Historica oratio vom Leben und Wandel des ehrwürdigen Herrn und thewren Mannes Gottes D. Martini Lutheri* (Leipzig: Johannes Rhambau, 1576), fol. 85^v.

4. Extant Work

While not originally its own genre, biography has existed as a cultural practice since classical and biblical antiquity and has generated countless examples of the form;¹⁷ contemporary to these early accounts, concerns began about the narrative process itself and how it might best be achieved.¹⁸ Biography has long been the subject of scholarly study, and the extant field of literature on the topic is extensive; the development of cultural studies in the second half of the twentieth century focused on the linguistic and representational qualities of biographical writing with a more detailed analysis of text. The development of narrative analysis has added a further dimension to such studies and opens the texts to an exploration of the creative and structural aspects of their construction, and how narrative itself may form the understanding of identity. Such studies demonstrate how individual lives and accounts of lives are to be understood within the contemporary cultural and structural settings and, significantly, ‘how new experiences are interpreted by individuals within families, small groups, and institutions’.¹⁹ The cultural and linguistic study of such writing was followed by a narrative and biographical approach which questioned the objectivity of not only the most partisan accounts but all historical writing,²⁰ and legitimizes a narrative study of the story-telling aspects of such texts to establish a methodology for their analysis.²¹

To date, detailed research has been carried out with appropriate emphasis given to classical life-writing, biblical forms as well as the vast number of medieval saints’ lives.²² More recently, the distinct genre of Renaissance biography was acknowledged as was how this developed to provide an account of fifteenth-century

¹⁷ See Michael Massuch, *The Origins of the Individualist Self: Autobiography and Self-identity in England, 1591-1791* (Cambridge: Polity, 1997).

¹⁸ See, for example, Plutarch, *Selected Lives*, trans. by Thomas North (Ware: Wordsworth, 1998), p. 385.

¹⁹ Brian Roberts, *Biographical Research* (Buckingham: Open Univ. P., 2002), p. 14.

²⁰ Catherine Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Analysis, Qualitative Research Methods*, 30 (California; London: Sage, 1993), p. 5.

²¹ See, for example, Hayden White, *The Content of Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1987).

²² For an introduction to the topic of classical biography, see Christopher Pelling, *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990) and *Literary Texts and the Greek Historian* (New York: Routledge, 2000), and Arnaldo Momigliano, *The Development of Greek Biography* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1971). For hagiography, Aigrin’s writings offer a comprehensive introduction: René Aigrin, *Hagiographie: ses sources, ses méthodes, son histoire* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1953).

scholars and humanists based on the tradition of classical life-writing. In the second half of the twentieth century, interest grew in the sixteenth-century biographies of reformers, and while the *lives* of Luther have received some attention, this has notably come from church historians working outside the narratological field. Initially research focussed on Catholic biographies of Luther, with the most notable research coming from Herte,²³ but this was later complemented from the Protestant perspective by Volz on Mathesius.²⁴ More recently, and in response to a growing interest in biographical and life-writing, early biographies of Luther have been studied in their attempt to establish the reformer's authority.²⁵

However, the most significant works either pre-date or do not consider the narrative turn of their texts, and as Backus indicates, sixteenth-century lives of reformers have not been the object of any serious general study, and yet such lives form an 'identifiable genre which falls between two subgenres: *Lives* of the reformers as restorers of true faith, and *Lives* of them as heretics'.²⁶

Since its first publication, Melanchthon's *Historia* has undergone numerous editions and acquired canonical status within the German-speaking world, enjoying print-runs well into the late nineteenth century. Acknowledging its influence, the text has again been translated into English and German within the last ten years and made available to a wider readership; the first as companion to Cochlaeus's life of Luther

²³ Adolf Herte, *Das katholische Lutherbild im Bann der Lutherkommentare des Cochläus*, 3 vols (Münster/W: Aschendorff, 1943), and *Die Lutherkommentare des Johannes Cochläus: Kritische Studie zur Geschichtsschreibung im Zeitalter der Glaubensspaltung*, Reformationgeschichte Studien und Texte, 33 (Münster/W: Aschendorff, 1935).

²⁴ Hans Volz, *Die Lutherpredigten des Johannes Mathesius: Kritische Untersuchungen zur Geschichtsschreibung im Zeitalter der Reformation*, Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationgeschichte, 12 (Leipzig: Heinsius, 1930).

²⁵ Eike Wolgast, 'Biographie als Autoritätsstiftung: Die ersten evangelischen Lutherbiographien', in Walther Berschin, ed., *Biographie zwischen Renaissance und Barock* (Heidelberg: Mattes, 1993), pp. 41-72. See also Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther as Prophet, Teacher, Hero: Images of the Reformer 1520-1620* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999).

²⁶ Irena Backus, *Life Writing in Reformation Europe: Lives of Reformers by Friends, Disciples and Foes*, St Andrews Studies in Reformation History (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. vii.

in its first translation since Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*,²⁷ and in the latter as a Latin-German parallel critical edition which seeks to inform ecumenical debate.²⁸

Despite his status as one of the most important intellectual figures of the Reformation, Melanchthon's influential *Historia de vita et actis Martini Lutheri* has remained largely neglected by scholars.²⁹ While the two modern translations offer a short commentary and references are repeatedly made to the text in scholarly writings,³⁰ there have been no detailed studies of the *Historia* to date. In her study of sixteenth-century biographies of reformers, Backus dismisses early lives of Luther, including Melanchthon's, as being little more than pegs for a history of the Reformation. Developing Volz's view that such works were more defences against Roman Catholic attacks, Backus argues that in such early Protestant lives Luther is cast essentially as an instrument of God, anchored in a national framework in which his depiction is locked somewhere between that of a saint and a theology handbook.³¹ What human characteristics emerge, Backus sees only as Melanchthon's indications as to the type of man God chose to act as an instrument and that only those relevant to the divine mission are shown.³² As such, the *Historia* does not offer for Backus any individual portrait of Luther whose representation is constrained by his rôle in eschatological design. Yet, this short and fragmentary biography has had a lasting effect not only on subsequent Protestant but also Catholic accounts of the reformer's life for the last five hundred years; it was the received biography for European Protestants, and while there have been numerous studies of the various aspects of Melanchthon's legacy, few if any studies have approached the text from a rhetorical tradition. Despite its influential status, the *Historia*'s contribution to the establishment of the *Lutherbild* has not been subjected to any detailed scrutiny.

²⁷ Johannes Cochlaeus, *Commentaria Ioannis Cochlaei de Actis et Scriptis Martini Lutheri Saxonis* (Mainz: F. Behem, 1549). The translation appears in *Luther's Lives: Two Contemporary Accounts of Martin Luther*, ed. and trans. by Elizabeth Vandiver, Ralph Keen and Thomas D. Frazel (Manchester: Manchester Univ. P., 2002). The *Historia* has recently been translated again into English in Franz Posset, 'Melanchthon's Memoirs: The Preface to the Second Volume of Luther's Works (1546)', in *The Real Luther* (Saint Louis, MI: Concordia, 2011), pp. 149-171.

²⁸ Harald Weinacht, *Melanchthon und Luther: Martin Luthers Lebensbeschreibung durch Philipp Melanchthon* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2008). The text had previously been edited by Gerhard Weng in *Melanchthon: deutsch*, vol. 2, ed. by Michael Beyer, Stefan Rhein and Günther Wartenberg (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1997; 2011), pp. 169-88.

²⁹ As Backus makes clear, this is the case for the majority of biographies of reformers by contemporaries or near-contemporaries; see Backus, *Life Writing*, p. 229.

³⁰ See, for example, James M. Weiss, 'Erasmus at Luther's Funeral: Melanchthon's Commemorations of Luther in 1546', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 16.1 (1985), 91-114.

³¹ Backus, *Life Writing*, p. 5 and p. 46.

³² Backus, *Life Writing*, p. 3.

Therefore, this analysis will demonstrate a clear connection between Melanchthon's *Historia* and an established tradition of writing ecclesiastical history as well as identifying the intellectual consciousness in which it was produced.

5. Extent of problem

Luther's first biographers had no obvious narrative model on which to base their accounts of the reformer's life. As such, early-modern biographers were confronted with fundamental questions regarding the writing of history; this thesis will demonstrate how they emplotted Luther's life into recognised rhetorical and literary genres, and created the forms that subsequent writing on Luther and the Reformation have taken. On a subliminal level, this emplotment has in turn determined our interpretation and understanding of that period of history. Through a study of the literary aspects of Melanchthon's *Historia* in light of post-structuralist historiography, this thesis will reveal which narrative models historians adopted and how these have developed in historical writing's quest for form in the early-modern period as representations moved towards recognisably 'historical' accounts. Moreover, the thesis will demonstrate how one 'great' historian produced a narrative form that has influenced virtually all subsequent historical writing on the Reformation.

The writing of history poses an epistemological question as to how the events of the past can accurately be recovered and represented; it is the duty of the historian to gather the appropriate data and to explain the connections between them so as to render the facts comprehensible. Crudely summarised, the traditional practice of writing history is one in which the facts speak for themselves and suggest the story that is to be told. With the advent of structuralist and constructivist theories, however, this view has been fundamentally challenged.

Barthes highlighted that the absence of a first-person narrator suggested that history writes itself *wie es eigentlich gewesen* [ist],³³ but indicated that this was a

³³ The full citation reads: *[m]an hat der Historie das Amt, die Vergangenheit zu richten, die Mitwelt zum Nutzen zukünftiger Jahre zu belehren, beigemessen: so hoher Aemter unterwindet sich gegenwärtiger Versuch nicht: er will bloß zeigen, wie es eigentlich gewesen.* Ranke's oft-quoted phrase epitomises the empiricist, objective tradition of writing history that shaped the discipline throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; it is subject to differing interpretations and is to be found in Leopold von Ranke, *Geschichte der romanischen und germanischen Völker von 1494 bis*

fallacy, and called for historians to consider their writing from a structuralist, linguistic approach.³⁴ For Barthes, historical writing does not show reality but is in fact a *signifié* and an artificial construction which both suppresses and is confused with its referent creating an *effet du réel* which is both an illusion and a confusion of reality.³⁵ Under the influence of Mink and others,³⁶ historiography has explored the question of historical writing and its relation to narrative which stresses that any image of the past is a product of the creative process that is narrative.³⁷ Ricœur sees narrative as the creative principle of understanding the world which takes a unit of action and casts it along with others into a distinct historical episode; as such, narrative allows the synthesis of disparate events into a completed history,³⁸ and the narrative or fable aspect of history thus becomes the yardstick that is key to an understanding of the event.

The narratological approach to the writing of history reaches one of its fullest articulations in the essentially formalist work of Hayden White, for whom history is a ‘verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse’ that is invented by the historian and not found.³⁹ White argues that historical writing is in no way distinct from fictional writing and that the factual aspect of history is a fiction. The past provides an incomplete and unprocessed record of events which may be organised into a chronicle by arrangement in temporal order of occurrence; in turn, this chronicle may be rendered into a story by organising its components into a discernible form with a beginning, a middle, and an end with individual elements assigned inaugural, transitional or terminating motifs. The historian does not uncover or find the story, but as the literary author must invent it and cast it around his data. Thus, historical facts possess no natural sense, and it is only through the process of encodation that facts acquire meaning in narrative. In order to gain an explanatory

1535 (Leipzig; Berlin: Reimer, 1824), I, Vorwort, pp. v-vi. For further discussion of its meaning, see Felix Gilbert, ‘What Ranke Meant’, *The American Scholar*, 56 [3] (1987), 393-397.

³⁴ Roland Barthes, ‘Le discours de l’histoire’, *Social Science Information*, 6 [4] (1967), 63-75 [68].

³⁵ Barthes, ‘Le discours de l’histoire’, 72 & ff.; see also Roland Barthes, *Littérature et réalité* (Paris: le Seuil, 1982), pp. 81-90.

³⁶ For an introduction to this development in historiography, see Louis O. Mink, ‘The Autonomy of Historical Understanding’, *History and Theory* 5.1 (1965), 2-47; William B. Gallie, *Philosophy and Historical Understanding* (New York: Chatto & Windus, 1964), and Arthur C. Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History* (Cambridge: CUP, 1965).

³⁷ See, for example, Paul Ricœur, *Temps et Récit*, 3 vols (Paris: le Seuil, 1983-5), I, pp. 85-13.

³⁸ Ricœur, I, pp. 55-84.

³⁹ Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973; 1975), p. ix.

effect for his disparate data, White's historian explains his story according to formal argument, emplotment, and ideological implication.

Formal argument seeks to explain what happens in a story by invoking principles of combination which serve as putative laws of historical explanation; such arguments are often commonsensical or generalisations, and focus on formist, organicist, mechanistic or contextualist approaches,⁴⁰ although White argues that the two former modes of argument have dominated historical writing to date.

Emplotment, for White, is the way in which a sequence of events fashioned into a story is gradually revealed to be a story of a particular kind.⁴¹ Drawing on Frye's theory of archetypal criticism and mythic structures,⁴² White argues that the historian must emplot a series of events in one archetypal story form for that story to be understood by his reader. These pre-existing plot structures underlie the human ability to understand the world and are necessary to fashion a comprehensive story from the individual historical data.

White reduces the ideological implication of a text to four basic ideological positions: anarchism, conservatism, radicalism, and liberalism.⁴³ These basic forms may be characterised according to their view of social change; they all recognize its inevitability but represent different views as to its desirability and its optimum pace of change. The ideological implication becomes, for White, the ethical moment of a historical work which combines with an aesthetic perception in the emplotment and a cognitive operation through the argument.

A specific combination of the above elements combines to create the historiographical style, although a deep level of consciousness operates in relating the different styles to one another, and the historian performs a poetic act in prefiguring the data and their emplotment. Significantly, however, questions of selection and choice rest with the historian. The combination of these three explanatory methods forces history into the realm of an essentially creative process, and history thus adopts a fictional aspect through its configuration into narrative.

⁴⁰ This aspect of White's argument draws on the work of Stephen Pepper, *World Hypotheses: A Study in Evidence* (Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California P., 1942).

⁴¹ White, *Metahistory*, p. 7

⁴² For further information on Frye's definition of comedy, romance, satire, and tragedy, see the relevant chapters in Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Univ. of Princeton P., 1973; 2000).

⁴³ White, *Metahistory*, p. 22. This aspect of White's argument is drawn from Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1952).

Through an analysis of the literary aspects of historical writing, the poetic element becomes obvious.

Despite encouragement to come to terms with literary and narrative analysis, the question of the commonality of history and literary texts is still largely ignored by professional historians, and contemporary practice appears to be largely unaffected by the works of White and others. On one level, White's argument undermines the science of history's claims to truth and is, therefore, unpalatable to many historians.⁴⁴ However, there has been a shift in the nature of historical writing which has acknowledged constructivist thought in its approach to content in examining how discourses of nationality, ideology, race, class, gender, and ethnicity shape the exercise of power, for example. While stimulating, this research has not adapted to questions of the form of representation and developed White's thinking;⁴⁵ where structuralist studies of historical writing have taken place, the focus has concentrated on nineteenth and twentieth century texts and topics and essentially has developed into an Anglo-Saxon tradition,⁴⁶ with pre-twentieth century German history remaining primarily the subject of German historians.

Therefore, while it is apparent that historiographical theories have been generated on a macro level on the relationship between a historical text's form and ideological intention, few, if any, large scale detailed studies have been conducted on a detailed narratological level. In light of the absence of in-depth studies, early-modern texts emerge to provide scope for significant, fruitful research. In particular, early histories of the Reformation are products of a period which rapidly develops a confessional divide and which required its first historians and biographers to develop a creative use of narrative to justify both the origins and course of a movement as well as its leader. In this context, Melancthon's *Historia* is a particularly rich source

⁴⁴ See, for example, the response of Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (London: Granta, 1997).

⁴⁵ For an overview of the effect of post-structuralist and constructivist historiography, see Patrick Finney, 'Hayden White, International History and Questions Too Seldom Posed', *Rethinking History*, 12 (1) (2008), 103-23.

⁴⁶ Two recent scholars exemplify the few works in this area on: Rosenberg on the understanding of the attack on Pearl Harbour and Campbell on the Bosnian War of the 1990s. See Emily S. Rosenberg, 'Considering Borders', in Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson (eds), *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), pp. 176-193, and Emily S. Rosenberg, *A Date Which Will Live Forever: Pearly Harbour in American Memory* (Durham, NC: Duke, 2003). For Campbell, see David Campbell, 'MetaBosnia: Narratives of the Bosnian War', *Review of International Studies*, 24 (2) (1998), 261-81, David Campbell, *National Deconstruction: Violence, Identity and Justice in Bosnia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota P., 1998), and David Campbell, 'Contra Wight: The Errors of a Previous Writing', *Review of International Studies*, 15 (2) (1999), 317-21.

of research and the thesis will demonstrate how post-structuralist historiographical theory can be used to identify the narrative traditions which were used to generate first histories of the Reformation and which in turn have dictated subsequent understanding of the period and the Reformation itself.

Using post-structuralist and -deconstructivist literary theories, the thesis identifies in Melanchthon's text generic traditions in historical writing and charts their development and transformation. Through detailed textual analysis and employing a reading of Frye's archetypal criticism and Genette's narrative theory, the *Historia* reveals genre and the generic conventions adopted by Protestant writers on the Reformation and how traditions were established. While a specific study of Melanchthon's life of Luther, the thesis provides a study of the development of historical-biographical writing itself, as well as the subject history's quest for the formalisation of historical writing, and thus contributes to the fields of historiography and Church history.

In focusing on Melanchthon's text, the thesis will contest the view initiated by Volz that the *Historia* is merely a defence of Luther and the evangelical party against Romanist attacks.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the thesis will challenge Backus's dismissal in general of early Protestant lives of Luther and specifically her dismissal of Melanchthon's biography as little more than a 'handbook of the German Reformation' with its focus on doctrine and Luther cast as the instrument of God which, along with other favourable sixteenth-century biographies of Luther, raised few if any questions to do with the function of biography.⁴⁸ As will be shown, Melanchthon was able to move beyond the limits imposed by the classical models he adopted and adapted, and was able to present a portrait of Luther that was not restricted to showing those aspects relevant to Luther's divine mission.

Indeed, the thesis will show that the *Historia* was produced according to the standards of sixteenth-century biography and drew on clear traditions of life-writing that had been established for centuries. Melanchthon adapts biographical models to create a narrative form that portrays Luther's life effectively within the context of

⁴⁷ Hans Volz, *Die Lutherpredigten des Johannes Mathesius: Kritische Untersuchungen zur Geschichtsschreibung im Zeitalter der Reformation*, Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationgeschichte, 12 (Leipzig: Heinsius, 1930), p. 3.

⁴⁸ Irena Backus, 'Luther: Instrument of God or Satan's Blood: Main Developments in Luther Biography 1546-81', in *Life Writing in Reformation Europe: Lives of Reformers by Friends, Disciples and Foes*, St Andrews Studies in Reformation History (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008) pp. 1-46 (p. 5).

orthodoxy. Significantly, with the *Historia* acknowledged to be the received life of the reformer, Melancthon's particular encodation and emplotment of the historical facts have influenced and continue to influence accounts of Luther's life and understanding of the Reformation to this day.

6. Historical Writing

The question as to what constitutes history has been asked since Antiquity; classical authors left a legacy of histories, biographies, chronicles and annals that influenced subsequent historical writing over the following fifteen hundred years. Yet history in its modern sense does not properly come into existence until the advent of Renaissance humanism when a greater stress was placed on causation and argument. At this point, attempts were made to move beyond simple records and description to a more evaluative narrative that sought to explain questions of ecclesiastical and national continuity, and it was only with the arrival of the Reformation at a time of heightened German nationalism that history acquired a pertinence to contemporary life that allowed it to develop fully into its own discipline. Early historians of the Reformation needed to legitimise their movements by locating the orthodoxy of their beliefs in ecclesiastical history while showing that the practices and beliefs of the Roman Church had debased and erred from true religion; to do this, historians developed a model of understanding the past that had its pedigree in historical writing from Antiquity onwards. Thus, history acquired significance in the Reformation through a combination of theological and nationalist agendas while drawing on a well-established narrative form.

A survey of the writings of Antiquity reveals a well-established classical attention to history, expressed in the numerous chronicles and annals, but these works reveal little interest in the question of causation and offer an interpretation that suggests the future will largely mirror the present.⁴⁹ However, classical history did offer a model for understanding the present through a theory of decline and decadence, which saw the root of contemporary immorality in the disregard for religion and society and which looked to the past as a model of purity. In this way, history adopts for authors such as Timaganes a moral aspect that is repeated

⁴⁹ For a general survey of the development of historiography, see Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval & Modern* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago P., 1983).

throughout the works of Livy. The focus of classical history when dealing with individuals was the narration of lives in the context of events, while the complementary genre of biography sought to examine the personalities that brought events about. The major concerns of early histories are the need for accuracy and good authority, equally hallmarks of early life-writing which were to reach their highest expression in Plutarch and Suetonius, but the question of truth properly belonged to philosophy.

The medieval period maintained the limited awareness of the past, inherited from classical antiquity, and treated any history with a focus on the present. Countless chronicles chart the history of towns while annals provide an account of institutional history, with both forms offering a description of events.⁵⁰ Extant texts assume the past to be a factual truth and present a record largely without question; as such, they offer little perspective on the past and reflect the historiographical practice of continuing extant histories without advancing any interpretative structure.⁵¹ Where an interpretative schema is provided, this follows a set pattern of a beginning, central event, followed by an ultimate goal; this model is essentially taken from Christian interpretations of the past with clear parallels in the Creation, Christ's life on earth, and the Last Judgement. This distinctly religious framework is reinforced with the repeated view that history provides a record of God's will at work in people and events.

The Middle Ages did see, however, a biographical renaissance in the eighth and ninth centuries which, in turn, helped to develop the medieval *gesta* with their strong institutional ties. Alongside such semi-official histories, the hagiographical genre developed a vast corpus of texts and its own generic framework, often blurring the distinction between hagiography and biography, especially when the subject was a well-established representative of the Church. Both the *gesta* and medieval hagiography reveal, however, a concept of evangelical purity and apostolic life in the *ecclesia primitiva* which had somehow been subverted thereafter; reformist literature of the period spoke of the golden past as the basis for a discussion on what perfect

⁵⁰ Bernard Guenée, 'Histoire, Annales, Chroniques: Essai sur les genres historiques au moyen âge', *Annales, Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, vol. 4 (1973), 997-1016, reprinted in Guenée, *Politique et Histoire au moyen-âge: recueil d'articles sur l'histoire politique et l'historiographie médiévale (1956-1981)* (Paris: Sorbonne, 1981), pp. 279-298.

⁵¹ Burke suggests that the concentration on an annalistic framework removed any interest in causation or the need for evidence; the self-perpetuating nature of the genre ensured its longevity. See Peter Burke, *The Renaissance Sense of the Past* (London: Arnold, 1969), p. 14.

Christian life had been rather than primarily as a tool for reform.⁵² This tradition of an ecclesiastical golden age is anchored in the heterodox writings of the late Middle Ages in the Waldensians,⁵³ Lollards,⁵⁴ and Hussites,⁵⁵ groups which all seek to affirm their own orthodoxy by arguing the continuity of purity in their own teachings while indicating that the Roman Church had declined and abandoned true religion. This contention was to reach fuller articulation in the Renaissance and would obviously serve the Reformers' narrative argument for a justification of their own origins.

The advent of the Renaissance represents the first serious stage in the development of a recognisably modern historical consciousness; while the chronicle continued to enjoy popularity, biography was adopted as the form that offered a greater level of interpretation. The period repeatedly saw a vigorous discussion on the nature of history and witnessed the founding of university chairs in the subject, the printing of numerous historical writings as well as the growing popularity of antiquarianism. While writings do demonstrate an awareness of anachronism, evidence and causation, it has been argued that Renaissance humanists did not create a unified historical process but merely used history as a hunting ground for whatever argument they were pursuing.⁵⁶

The dawning of a historical consciousness in its modern sense is best exemplified by one of the most famous pieces of early-modern historical scholarship, Valla's work on the Donation of Constantine. While the Donation had been granted a

⁵² Glen Olsen, 'The Idea of the *Ecclesia Primitiva* in the Writings of the Twelfth-Century Canonists', *Traditio*, 25 (1969), 61-86.

⁵³ Given the very nature of heterodox groups, extant writings are sparse, and it can be difficult to reconstruct a detailed understanding of the various groups' thinking. For a discussion of the Waldensian concept of history, see Peter Biller, 'Medieval Waldensians' Construction of the Past', in *The Waldenses, 1170-1530*, Variorum Collected Studies Series (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 191-204. See also Alexander Patschovsky, 'The Literacy of Waldensianism from Valdes to c. 1400', in Peter Biller and Anne Hudson (eds), *Heresy and Literacy, 1000-1530* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), pp. 112-136.

⁵⁴ Hudson offers an overview of the Lollard understanding of ecclesiastical decline in Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988).

⁵⁵ Given Hus's status and appearance at Constance, his thought has been better preserved in documents. See Jan Hus, *Tractatus de ecclesia* (Cambridge: Heffer, 1956); for a discussion of Hussite thought, see Matthew Spinka, *John Hus at the Council of Constance* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1965), and Matthew Spinka, *John Hus's Concept of the Church* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. P., 1966).

⁵⁶ Kelley argues that the Renaissance saw history rise 'grandly in the scale of western learning' to become a 'surrogate for the tradition of 'true religion''; see Donald R. Kelley, 'The Theory of History', in Charles B. Schmitt, Quentin Skinner, Eckhard Kessler, and Jill Kraye (eds), *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy* (Cambridge: CUP, 1988), pp. 746-761 (p. 746).

certain legendary quality for some time, it was largely accepted throughout the middle ages as a historical event.⁵⁷ However, the eighth-century document which contains the main textual account of the episode, the *Constitutum Constantini*, began to receive greater attention following its incorporation into the Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals (c. 847-853), and subsequently by Gratian's inclusion of it in the *Decretum*, and thereby its entry into Canon Law.⁵⁸ While this remarkable document was almost universally accepted as genuine from the ninth to the fifteenth century, the text's relatively late production suggests that there was a certain discomfort with the fact that these changes had happened historically and that there was a need to ground them in a single defining act of an authoritative figure.

While the veracity of the legend had been questioned before the Renaissance,⁵⁹ the focus was primarily on aspects of the document's content and questions regarding the secularisation of the Church.⁶⁰ Occam and Nicholas of Cusa both challenged the Donation and questioned its legal status, and highlighted problems regarding proof.⁶¹ The constant doubt which had surrounded the authenticity of the Donation throughout the High Middle Ages reached its height in the fifteenth century and the advent of Humanism. Valla was the first critic to deal systematically with the legend and the text of the Donation of Constantine with a now familiar historical methodology. While the first printed edition of Valla's *Declamatio de falso credita et ementita donacione Constantini* (1440) did not emerge until 1517, the treatise quickly ensured that the authenticity of the Donation was

⁵⁷ See the discussion of the legend's reception in Johann von Döllinger, 'Constantin und Silvester', *Die Papstfabeln des Mittelalters* (Munich: J. G. Cotta, 1863), pp. 61-72.

⁵⁸ Gratian, *Decretum* or *Concordia discordantium canonum*, D. XCVI c. 14, in *Corpus iuris canonici*, vol. 1, ed. Aemilius Friedberg (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1879), cols 342-345.

⁵⁹ For an overview of the document's history, see Gerhard Laehr, *Die Konstantinische Schenkung in der abendländischen Literatur des Mittelalters bis zur Mitte des 14. Jahrhunderts*, Historische Studien, 166 (Berlin: Emil Eberling, 1926), and Wilhelm Levison, *Konstantinische Schenkung und Silvesterlegende*, Estratto dalla Miscellanea Fr. Ehrle, 2 (Rome: Tipografia del Senato, 1924), pp. 159-247.

⁶⁰ See Hugo of Fleury, 'Tractatus de regia potestate et ecclesiastica dignitate', ed. by E. Sackur, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Libelli de Lite*, 3 vols (Hannover: Bibliophilus Hahnianus, 1891-97), II (1892), 465-494, and Bernard of Clairvaux, 'De consideratione IV. 3', in *Five Books on Advice to a Pope*, trans. and ed. by John D. Anderson and Elizabeth T. Kennan, Cistercian Father Series, 37 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1976).

⁶¹ See William of Occam, *Breviloquium de Potestate Papae*, ed. by L. Baudry, *Etudes de Philosophie Médiévale*, 24 (Paris: Vrin, 1937), and Nicholas of Cusa, *De concordantia catholica*, trans. and ed. by Paul E. Sigmund (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. P., 1991).

beyond truth.⁶² Valla dismisses the document's authenticity through contextual analysis, logic, and a study of the text's Latinity; his concern throughout the treatise is to indicate that the account of the Donation is flawed both historically, as is shown through comparison with contemporary sources, and linguistically through comparison with classical texts, 'cuius ex stultiloquio impudentissimum eius patescit [/patescet] sua sponte mendacium'.⁶³

Valla's critique of the text was so total and successful that it overturned any claims of authenticity for the document, even while some of its supporters maintained its veracity until its fate was finally sealed by Baronius in his *Annales Ecclesiastici*.⁶⁴ This milestone in historical scholarship became a cornerstone of humanist and subsequently Reformation propaganda, and marked a distinct development in the creation of a critical historical consciousness that could be adopted and adapted by subsequent authors.

The Reformation is often defined by its principle of *sola scriptura*,⁶⁵ yet it might be argued that the cornerstone of the Reformation was the conception of a different view of history.⁶⁶ While much early Protestant history was situational and dependent on the circumstances in which it was produced, it is topological with its figures and events used to illustrate contemporary life. Its differing conception in turn pervaded every aspect of the church, and history was used as a defence and a weapon of both sides. Thus, both parties developed an interest in history as a way of supporting its own special view of history. The truth of historical continuity became crucial to an understanding of ecclesiastical history; for the reforming parties, there must have always been a few witnesses to divine truth, however obscured.⁶⁷

⁶² Christopher B. Coleman, *The Treatise of Lorenzo Valla on the Donation of Constantine*, Renaissance Society of America Reprint Texts (Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press, 1993).

⁶³ Coleman, p. 105.

⁶⁴ Cesare Baronio, *Annales ecclesiastici* (Antwerp: Johannes Moreti, 1612).

⁶⁵ As, for example, in J.P. Kirsch, 'The Reformation', in *The Catholic Encyclopaedia*, 17 vols (XII), ed. by Charles G. Herbermann (London: Encyclopaedia Press, 1913); available on-line at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12700b.htm#II> [last accessed 25/8/2006].

⁶⁶ See Peter C. Hodgson, ed., 'The Reformation and the Old Protestant View of History: *The Magdeburg Centuries*', in *Ferdinand Christian Baur on the Writing of Church History* (New York: OUP, 1968), pp. 78-105. See also John M. Headley, 'The Reformation as Crisis in the Understanding of Tradition', *ARG*, 78 (1987), 5-23 (pp. 11-12).

⁶⁷ Bruce Gordon, 'The Changing Face of Protestant History in the Sixteenth Century', in Bruce Gordon, ed., *Protestant History and Identity in Sixteenth-Century Europe: The Medieval Inheritance & The Later Reformation*, 2 vols, St Andrews Studies in Reformation History (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1996), I, pp. 1-22.

Prior to the Reformation, the Roman Catholic view of history had remained unchanged as long as the Catholic Church had maintained an ‘unrestricted forward movement’.⁶⁸ With the Reformation schism, Protestant historians were required to explain the division between purity and corruption that had required the Protestant movement to emerge and to justify tradition. With the Protestant emphasis on dogma, the presence of the Word guaranteed consistency and constancy, thereby fulfilling Christ’s promise to remain with the faithful (Matthew 28. 20, and John 14. 1-17); simultaneously, Protestants were able to develop the established concept of decline from heterodox and Renaissance authors to show where the Catholic Church had deviated from its true mission. Therefore, the Reformation subsequently sought to recover the thought of the primitive Church in a bid to degenerate contemporary Catholic tradition and practice. Thus in Protestant thinking, the Lutheran movement becomes the guardian of apostolic purity and succession, and it is the duty of Protestant history to identify and exemplify witnesses to the true faith from the past. Again, early Protestant historians seek to develop an emplotment which legitimizes their movement and in which the argument of the witnesses was crucial to reassure the faithful of the righteousness of their beliefs and answer the charge of heretical innovation.⁶⁹

Throughout this period of the early Reformation, Protestant and Roman Catholic historiography becomes antithetical, and is based on concepts of luminosity and darkness. In its genesis stages, Protestant authors look to unify history to identify causation and establish a clear and discernible argument. In this way, early Protestant historians determine the nature of history as a clear argument punctuated by example and use the subject in its narrative form to justify the religious schism, and the righteousness of their cause.

Moreover, it is significant that the German-speaking lands of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries provided a context which was instrumental in the development of both a historical consciousness as well as desire to understand the past. In turn, this growing interest in history was able to support the distinctly German reformation and allowed Luther to fulfil the rôle of a contemporary Arminius.

⁶⁸ Peter C. Hodgson, ed. *Ferdinand Baur*, p. 79.

⁶⁹ This understanding of ecclesiastical history was to reach its apotheosis in Flacius Illyricus’s *Catalogus testium veritatis* (Basel: Johannes Oporinus, 1556) and the Magdeburg Centuries, *Ecclesiastica historia* (Basel: Oporinus, 1559-74).

The fifteenth century witnessed a marked growth in nationalism throughout Europe, but especially in France and England where the concept of a nation-state was advanced and power extensive. In contrast, the fragmented and un-unified German lands looked on in envy at the influence and power of their neighbours while they were the 'vigorous entanglement of component parts'.⁷⁰ Simultaneously, throughout the fifteenth century, a growing sense that German society had gone astray developed; in part, this was seen to be a consequence of foreign, and especially Italian, influence on contemporary life. With little understanding of their own past and antiquity, German humanists were powerless to respond to such criticism but wished for the unjust depiction of the Germans to be redressed;⁷¹ as a consequence, interest was borne in German history and how this might answer the needs of the present.

Scholars initially looked to develop a concept of Germany through a coherent view of its own past that could explain the present; inherited models and texts, however, lacked coherence and pertinence. The dominant models tended to parochialism and recorded events with little sense of causality or interpretation.⁷² Where German heroes did exist in Arminius, Siegfried, and Barbarossa, these were used to exemplify national virtues.⁷³ In historiographical terms, this fledgling movement saw the abandonment of the chronicle which had hitherto dominated German historical writing but which was distinctly local in focus and lacked pertinence. Historical scholars sought to create a community with one destiny, and in this way steer the formation of a national consciousness at a point when patriotic grievance coincided with a search for heroic past.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Gerhard Benecké, *Society and Politics in Germany: 1500-1750* (London: Routledge, 1974), p. 161.

⁷¹ See Bernd Moeller, 'Die deutschen Humanisten und die Anfänge der Reformation', in *Die Reformation und das Mittelalter*, ed. by Heinz Schilling (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991).

⁷² See Michael Stolleis, 'Public Law and Patriotism in the Holy Roman Empire, in *Infinite Boundaries: Order, Disorder and Reorder in Early Modern German Culture*, Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies, 40, ed. by Max Reinhart (Kirkville, MI: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1998), pp. 11-35.

⁷³ Hans Kloft, 'Die Idee einer deutschen Nation zu Beginn der frühen Neuzeit: Überlegungen zur Geschichte *Germania* des Tacitus und zum *Arminius* Ulrichs von Hutten', in Rainer Wiegels and Winfried Woessler, eds, *Arminius und die Varusschlacht: Geschichte, Mythos, Literatur* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2003).

⁷⁴ See Gerald Strauss, *Manifestations of Discontent in Germany on the Eve of the Reformation* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. P., 1971), p. 65.

With the re-discovery of Tacitus,⁷⁵ German humanists discovered worthy and distinctly German values and heroes which not only answered the charges of Italian criticism but provided an ancient model of purity to which German society could return⁷⁶. The variety of positive examples and provenance ensured a popularity and interest in Tacitus that continued well beyond the Reformation.⁷⁷ As a symbol of German antiquity, histories were able to represent through Tacitus the honest German in battle against the corrupting foreigner as well as provide models of established purity. In this way, a desire existed in Germany for a German liberator in the Arminius mould at the eve of the Reformation both in scholarly as well as more popular culture.⁷⁸

The sixteenth century confirmed this interest in Germany's history and national identity, and in the depiction of the Reformation, in its genesis years an essentially German affair, lent itself neatly to this besieged view of the past. The new religious movement, anchored in the heart of those same German lands, was cast similarly against Roman culture and was able to adopt the pre-established audience of the fledgling German nationalist movement. In this way, the Lutheran Church was able to build on the nationalist agenda and answer some of its calls for a distinctly German unifying hero in the form of Luther.

In the *Historia*, Melanchthon plays and draws on this national[ist] historical movement, and casts Luther as the German hero of the day, alongside an emplotment of ecclesiastical history that had its origins in heterodox and orthodox argument of the preceding centuries. Against this back-drop, Luther's protests fall on well-prepared ground, but equally Melanchthon's representation of Luther fits the desired ideal of a German hero. The depiction of Luther conforms to the positive stereotypes

⁷⁵ While an awareness of Tacitus had of course existed before the fifteenth century, the limited access to his writings restricted argument.

⁷⁶ This theme was adopted by many early sixteenth-century historians including Beatus Rhenanus, Bebel, and Cochlaeus. See, for example, Jakob Wimpheling's selective use of Tacitus in his *Epitoma* in which he makes clear that any criticism of Germans is proof of ill-will and envy; see Jakob Wimpheling, *Epitoma rerum Germanicarum usque ad nostra tempora* (Strasbourg: C. Duntzemi, 1505).

⁷⁷ By the end of the first decade of the sixteenth century, over sixty editions of Tacitus's works had been produced, while the mutilated preservation of his works was regarded by some German reformers as proof of a papal conspiracy to conceal his words from history. See Kenneth C. Schellhase, *Tacitus in Renaissance Political Thought* (Chicago; London: Univ. of Chicago P., 197), p. 4.

⁷⁸ See Jacques Ridé, 'Arminius in der Sicht der deutschen Reformatoren', in Rainer Wiegels and Winfried Woessler, eds, *Arminius und die Varusschlacht: Geschichte, Mythos, Literatur* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2003), pp. 197-210.

of the German ideal, even when representing the negative aspects of Luther's personality. While Melanchthon is careful in his selection of such attributes, the overriding image of the Reformer is that of a very German hero. As a text that was promptly translated into German and primarily disseminated in the German-speaking lands, the *Historia* helps provide a German unifying force, inspired by a unifying figure at a time when real attempts were being made to create a distinctly German culture.⁷⁹

7. Melanchthon & History

Throughout his adult life, Melanchthon showed a keen interest in history, in part a natural development of his humanist interests. While still in Tübingen, Melanchthon had overseen an edition of the chronicle of Johannes Nauclerus,⁸⁰ and he expressed clear plans for a number of historical works but sadly did not come to complete them.⁸¹ Later in Wittenberg, Melanchthon encouraged the painter Johannes Setzer to publish chronicles and historical works for students, and corresponded with Caspar Hedio. What historical writings he did produce, range from shorter pieces and prefaces to the *Chronicon*.⁸² Melanchthon's work on history has been regarded by some as bridging the gap between the Renaissance and the nineteenth-century science of history.⁸³ From the range of writings left on the subject and his involvement in its introduction as a university subject at Wittenberg, Melanchthon's estimation of the subject is clear as is his rationale for its importance.

Scholarly debate has questioned whether Melanchthon divided history into sacred and profane,⁸⁴ but it is clear that Melanchthon viewed history as the provider

⁷⁹ For further discussion on the development of a distinctly German history, see James J. Sheehan, 'What is German history? Reflections on the role of nation in German history and historiography', *JMH*, 53 (1981), 1-23.

⁸⁰ Johannes Nauclerus, *Memorabilium omnis aetatis et omnium gentium chronici commentarii* (Tübingen: Thomas Anshelm, 1516).

⁸¹ *CR*, 1, 362.

⁸² Philipp Melanchthon, *Chronicon Carionis expositum et auctum multis et veteribus et recentibus historiis in narrationibus rerum graecarum, germanicarum et ecclesiasticarum a Philippo Melanchthone* (Wittenberg: Georg Rhau, 1558); the 1560 edition is available in *CR*, 12, 709-1094.

⁸³ Donald Kelley, 'Historiography: German', in *Encyclopedia of the Renaissance*, ed. by Paul F. Gendler (New York: Scribner, 1999), 3, p. 180.

⁸⁴ For a summary of this debate, see Peter Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum: The Function of Patristic Argument in the Theology of Philip Melanchthon*, *Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 46 (Geneva: Droz, 1961), 57-61.

of examples from which the reader may draw morals with history showing the reader God's hand at work. Backus suggests that Melanchthon saw all history as ordained by God but he chose to subdivide into categories for practical purposes. For Melanchthon, all history reveals something of divine providence; sacred history teaches us to recognise God, and the history of the Church is a sub-category of sacred history. Importantly, a knowledge of history is necessary for all, but especially rulers, whose duty it is to lead people to piety and salvation.

In the *Chronicon*, Melanchthon adopted a common trope of Protestant historical writing which cast the Church into a model of perpetual decline with the true Church forever threatened by doctrinal errors and every attempt at reform sought to return Her to the purer doctrine of the past. Individual fathers are sent by God to combat heresies when, at times, divine providence and political circumstances make it possible for the Church to emerge from the deluge. Throughout history, orthodox and heterodox positions are fixed with basic doctrinal issues remaining unaltered; history's duty is to provide the knowledge to distinguish between doctrine. History provides its student with a 'genealogy of orthodoxy and [...] shows where and when the Church went wrong'.⁸⁵ For Melanchthon, history is the means of combatting contemporary heresy.

8. Classical Biography

Early Protestant accounts of Luther's life draw on pre-existing models of biographical writing and suggest a unique figure with many of the traits of the hero of sacred biography; it is reasonable to assume that the authors, as the leading sixteenth-century humanists and biblical scholars of Germany, drew on classical writing as well as religious and biblical models. Given the related traditions and narrative crossover between Gospel and ancient biographical writing,⁸⁶ this thesis will show that these two inter-related narrative forms act as the common inheritance and provide narrative models for the first accounts of Luther's life.

⁸⁵ Irena Backus, *Historical Method and Confessional Identity in the Era of the Reformation*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought, 94 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), p. 331.

⁸⁶ See Albrecht Dihle, *Studien zur griechischen Biographie*, Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen Philologisch-Historische Klasse, 37 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970).

It has been argued that the Gospels are without parallels in form and content, but that the individual Gospels do have much in common materially and formally with one another, and as such constitute a literary genre in themselves. The representatives of this particular genre are limited in number to the four canonical and a few apocryphal Gospels and are limited in time to the end of the first century A.D. Guelich defines the gospel genre as ‘an account concerning the public life and teaching of a significant person that is composed of discrete traditional units placed in the context of the Scriptures’.⁸⁷ The framework of the Gospels’ structure existed in the Church’s preaching and teaching, evinced by the common framework underlying Acts, Mark’s and John’s Gospels. Materially, all Gospels consist of the message that God was at work in Jesus’s life, death and resurrection.

The Gospels do share content with early biographical writing in the representation of a charismatic hero and the anecdotal structure. They were produced in a period of great literary activity, and against the extant literary tradition of Greek, Roman and Judaic literature, the scale of the Gospels appears small. The aim of the Gospels was clear: to promote the new religious movement. They were not intended as historical writings but rather as propagandist tracts of the early Christian movement.⁸⁸ Votaw argues that the Gospels draw on first- and second-century homiletical traditions and are not chronicling but dramatic productions, presenting pictures of Jesus as a divine person on earth, and their simple graphic style made them influential. Since the nineteenth century, discussion surrounding the question of the relationship between the Gospels and ancient biographical models has varied between two positions, in which their similarities have been equally affirmed and questioned. More recently, the Gospels’ parallels with Greco-Roman biography have been acknowledged, although they should of course not be judged by the standard of modern biography,⁸⁹ and current scholarship argues that the first-century reader would have seen the gospels as biographies or ‘lives’ of Jesus.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Robert Guelich, ‘The Gospel Genre’, in *Das Evangelium und die Evangelien*, ed. by Peter Stuhlmacher, *WUNT*, 28 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1983), pp. 183-219 (p. 217).

⁸⁸ Clyde Weber Votaw, ‘The Gospels and Contemporary Biographies in the Greco-Roman World’, *American Journal of Theology*, 19 (1915), 45-73 and 217-49; reprinted as *The Gospels and Contemporary Biographies in the Greco-Roman World*, Biblical Series, 27 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970) [all references refer to the reprinted edition], p. 3

⁸⁹ G. N. Stanton, *The Gospels and Jesus* (Oxford: OUP, 1989), pp. 15-20.

⁹⁰ Richard Burridge, *What are the Gospels*, Society for New Testament Studies, 70 (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), p. 53.

Classical biography is not a clearly defined genre; the number of biographies that have been handed down indicates that it covered different types of writing. Biography is a relatively late-developed form and was never disciplined through a long and much discussed stylistic tradition, and in many examples is a hybrid between literary and historiographical genres. The situation is problematical because there is but a small proportion of works that have been provided from Antiquity.⁹¹ Classical biography can be defined, Dihle shows, as the interest in an unchangeable personality rather than the description of his being, not only in the characteristic speeches, actions and achievements but also in the being of the personality which can serve as the unity of his actions and fate expressed in a description of his life.⁹² The interest in the person must be primary; thus biography contains elements of narrative and description.

Polybius provides a definition of biography, historical writing and encomium in the excursus to the biography of Philopoemen, although Polybius is himself part of a larger tradition.⁹³ There is a clear distinction between biography and historical writing, but that biographical writing often finds its way into history, and as Burridge argues, there is significant crossover between biography and its neighbouring genres, such as historiography, encomium, rhetoric, moral philosophy.⁹⁴ Polybius follows an oriental-Judaic tradition of biography in seeing historical events as the deeds of magnificent men. This trend was subordinated, however, in the classical, hellinistic historical writing of Herodotus and Thucydides when the laws governing history assumed priority. Yet with Philip II and Alexander, the concentration on the individual again assumed supremacy, and thus Aristotle demonstrates that an individual and his unrepeatable deeds are important.

Biography as a fixed literary form had come into being later than encomium but its character had settled during the 4th century B.C. Both genres were similar and shared the common principle of representing the virtues of the hero through the narrative.⁹⁵ Plutarch concentrates on history as providing examples of morality and

⁹¹ Albrecht Dihle, *Studien zur griechischen Biographie*, Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen Philologisch-Historische Klasse, 37 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), p. 8.

⁹² Albrecht Dihle, 'Die Evangelien und die griechische Biographie', in *Das Evangelium und die Evangelien*, ed. by Peter Stuhlmacher, WUNT, 28 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1983), pp. 383-411.

⁹³ Polybius, *The Histories*, trans. by W. R. Parton (London: Heinemann, 1922-27).

⁹⁴ Burridge, *What are the Gospels*, p. 80.

⁹⁵ Dihle, *Entstehung*, p. 16.

morals which illustrate character, and which in turn the character illustrates. Encomium presents the achievements of a man through biographical details in the right light. The focus is on his achievements and not on his life. It is this achievement of the man that can be separated from his life that has historical significance and the meaning of the individual.⁹⁶

By the 4th century B.C., biography had been distinguished from history as the account of a life of an individual, although from the 5th century B.C., it was increasingly common for Greek historians to insert biographical sketches into their narratives. Subjects tended to be great political or intellectual leaders, and a biography's aim was to perpetuate the teachings of the subject. Often a major part of the material is quotation of the words and sayings of the subject, and while an account of an individual's life, the main interest focuses on ideas. The representation of the subject's teaching, particularly in intellectual biography, is often enlivened by association with acts or events in the subject's life and recounted in anecdotal form. Thus, early biography enables an easy transition from biography to philosophy; the leader provides a moral message which is then noted down by followers. The biographer renders a second service in providing the picture in the more easily and better understood context of the life of the subject.

In such early biographies, there are close parallels between the various lives of Socrates and the Gospels. They both have a similar motive in wanting to restore and build up the reputation and influence of one who had been put to death by the state as a dangerous person, but whose contribution to human welfare was great. The form is similar in the preservation of the more important sayings of Socrates, and the tendency in the Gospels to draw from Jesus's teachings a formal code of ethics with a formal ecclesiastical organisation and to invest his message and doctrine with a mystical soteriological doctrine follows the Gentile tradition.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Dihle, *Studien*, p. 10.

⁹⁷ Plato's *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito* and *Phaedo* all present the last days of Socrates' life and thus only a snapshot of a particular period of his life. They are highly mimetic and take the form of dialogue, and thus allow Plato to demonstrate Socratic thinking through the use of a debate, in itself highly illustrative of Socrates. Anecdotes of the subject's life are interwoven into the dialogues and exemplify a particular part of Socratic philosophy. In the *Apology*, Plato establishes the governing principle of Socrates' character that determines his life, and thus a detail of his personality assumes a greater biographical significance. See Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates: Euthyphro; Apology, Crito; & Phaedo*, trans. and ed. by Hugh Tredennick and Harold Tarrant (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1954; 1993).

Classical biography is basically divided between the Plutarchan and the Suetonian, although both authors share the common purpose of revealing the cohesion of the Greek and Roman worlds in the unity of the empire. Plutarch's prefaces show that there was a distinct hellinistic biographical genre of which his contemporaries were aware,⁹⁸ and his writings show a difference between historical writings and *vita*: the former shows the history of a period as the development of events shown in the actions and suffering of the hero, and will therefore include the most illustrious events of a hero's life, while events are only important in a Plutarchan biography as indicators of the hero's character, which may not necessarily include the events for which the subject is famous. The difference between biography and encomium is clear in that the latter does not provide a full description of the life but rather the selected and documented characteristics of the hero. Nevertheless, Plutarch maintains a chronological structure, used for men of action and politics, while Suetonius, adopts a more systematically or topically ordered form for literary men.⁹⁹ Both authors, but especially Plutarch, have a concern for morality and seek to edify and entertain through their lives.

In the writings of both Plutarch and Suetonius, narrative is characterized by the concentration and focus on one person which is reflected in the verbal syntax. The prose narratives have a chronological structure and draw on an established range of *topoi*, moving from ancestry and birth to education and upbringing, adult and public life, to last years and death, all of which function as vehicles to illustrate certain arguments and demonstrate character, but such *topoi* are not to be seen as prescriptive, as some are missing from some works. The scale of the texts is limited to the subjects' lives, and there is a mixture of literary units, including anecdotes, saying, stories, discourses and speeches. The anecdote is used to relate an unusual feature of the subject's character and functions as the major vehicle of biographical characterization. To this end, Plutarch, for example, uses dubious anecdotes that better illustrate the character of Alexander rather than more reliable 'facts'; in order to make the character known, everyday acts become more informative than great

⁹⁸ Albrecht Dihle, *Die Entstehung der historischen Biographie*, Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, 3 (Heidelberg: Winter & Universitätsverlag, 1986), p. 7.

⁹⁹ Burridge, p. 17.

acts.¹⁰⁰ Plutarch also insists on the moral perspective of biography, which in turn requires a degree of selectivity regarding the ‘facts’ of the story.

While the Plutarchan scheme is essentially chronological, Suetonius adopts a topological approach; characterization is indirect and shown through the actions of the subject, with direct description being rare even in Suetonius. There is a mixture of high and popular literary style. As with the earlier biographies, a fairly serious and respectful atmosphere is created in all texts. There is blend of stereotypical and realistic characterization which again prevents generalisation, and the authorial intention reflects those aims of the earlier biographies, and they are written to fulfil a variety of purposes.¹⁰¹ The aim of such early biographical writing ranges from the informative to the entertaining, but essentially classical *βίοι* are exemplary and encomiastic while serving apologetic and polemic ends.

In his study of the four canonical Gospels, Burrige develops the redaction and genre criticism of the 1970s to establish key features of Greco-Roman biography; combining this with structuralist and the archetypal criticism of Frye, Burrige identifies similarities within the Gospels and, thereby, asserts the common inheritance from classical life writing. By adopting Burrige’s methodology, this thesis will analyse the external features of the *Historia* to demonstrate Melancthon’s inheritance from the *βίοι* of Antiquity as well as the Gospels.

9. Concluding Remarks

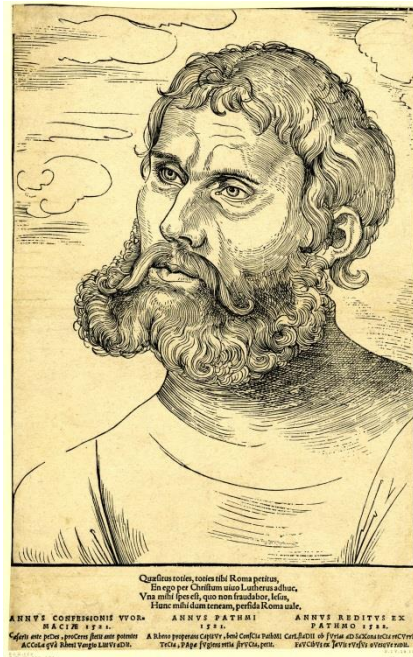
Melancthon’s *Historia* is a worthy biography of Luther, and it is an account that draws on and conforms to the biographical standards of the sixteenth century; by incorporating the form and traditions of biblical and classical narratives, the *Historia* combines bibliography with a developing historiographical consciousness to cast Luther’s life both as an example and a vehicle to tell the Reformation story, but, significantly, it retains its focus on the life of Luther. By analysing the external features of the *Historia*, this thesis will identify generic crossover with the pre-existing tradition of life writing, and through close textual analysis will indicate the individual stylistic aspects of the text and the influence it has had on all subsequent accounts of Luther’s life.

¹⁰⁰ See Dihle, *Evangelien*, p. 390.

¹⁰¹ For a brief survey of the structures of classical biography, see C. B. R. Pelling, ‘Biography, Greek and Roman’, in Simon Horblower and Anthony Spawforth (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Classical Civilisation* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), pp. 116-118.

Chapter Two:

The Broad Genre



1. Introduction

All literature operates within a framework of connections and expectations; just as the debate surrounding the production of the Gospels concluded,¹⁰² it must be accepted that no text is *sui generis*,¹⁰³ and that '[a]ll literature may in fact be genre based, without this being consciously realised'.¹⁰⁴ In this sense, genre becomes the intentional or accidental organising principle of a work which structures the author's meaning into a recognisable whole. It is precisely this use of genre that allows the

¹⁰² Beginning with the work of Weber Votaw, the debate surrounding the gospels' inheritance from classical biography has ranged from assertion to denial over the last century. See Clyde Weber Votaw, 'The Gospels and Contemporary Biographies in the Greco-Roman World', *American Journal of Theology*, 19 (1915), 45-73 and 217-49; reprinted as *The Gospels and Contemporary Biographies in the Greco-Roman World*, Biblical Series, 27 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970). Current consensus is best represented by the work of Richard Burridge, *What are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, 70 (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), p. 53.

¹⁰³ See E. D. Hirsch Jr, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale Univ. P., 1967), p. 103.

¹⁰⁴ Alastair Fowler, 'The Life and Death of Literary Forms', in *New Directions in Literary History*, ed. by Ralph Cohen (London: Routledge, 1974), p. 81.

reader's subjective response to be controlled and directed, and ultimately enables him to recognise what the author has communicated; thus, genre becomes a critical guide to understanding.¹⁰⁵ As such, a study of a text's genre as organising principle allows the text to be located in its literary relationships and the hermeneutical circle to be broken and the text's meaning fully understood.¹⁰⁶

Despite the text's age and the status of its author, Melanchthon's *Historia* has never been subjected to any significant or detailed scrutiny either in terms of its form or its content, although as stated earlier it has received some attention in larger studies but primarily from church historians. Nevertheless, it is suggested by scholars that the text shares affinities with classical writing;¹⁰⁷ however, given the extensive number and variety of the sources which Melanchthon could have drawn on, any identification of influential texts is a problematical undertaking.

Just as the narrative model of decline had its origins prior to the Reformation, it is unlikely that its early followers invented new modes of representation to depict the life of the Lutheran movement's founder. It is far more likely that early historians of the Reformation and Martin Luther, as some of Germany's leading humanist scholars, would adopt familiar structures to represent and interpret the recent past in a recognisable form. Given Melanchthon's overt statements regarding Luther's status as a prophet of the Church, it is, therefore, reasonable to assume that Melanchthon drew on existing plot structures, found in classical biographical and gospel models, that were readily known to his audience and which suited his interpretative principle.

Definition of genre requires the text to be understood in relational terms and must consider how it relates to any antecedent genre, understood in the historical context of its production. This situation is further complicated by the lack of consensus among classical scholars as to an accepted definition of Greco-Roman biography. Yet, genre study has shown that 'each age has a small repertoire of genres that its readers [...] can respond to with enthusiasm',¹⁰⁸ and a comparison which draws on the major texts of classical life-writing may serve as an appropriate basis

¹⁰⁵ Hirsch, *Validity*, p. 80-81.

¹⁰⁶ Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genre and Modes* (Oxford: OUP, 1982), p. 298.

¹⁰⁷ See Irena Backus, *Life Writing in Reformation Europe: Lives of Reformers by Friends, Disciples and Foes*, St Andrews Studies in Reformation History (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, pp. 226-7.

for examination. Dihle's definition of classical life-writing offers a useful summary of the genre as a starting point for an analysis:

Interesse an einer unverwechselbaren Persönlichkeit nicht in der bloßen Deskription ihres Wesens, nicht nur in ihrer Erfassung durch einzelne charakteristische Reden, Handlungen oder Leistungen [...] sondern wo das Wesen dieser Persönlichkeit durch die als Einheit aufgefaßte Gesamtheit ihrer Handlungen und Schicksale, kurz durch ihren Lebenslauf, erfaßt und ausgedrückt wird. Wichtig ist dabei, daß das Interesse an der Person in dem Sinne primär sein muß, als die Lebensbeschreibung nicht einem außerhalb ihrer selbst liegenden Zweck dient [...].¹⁰⁹

While Melancthon's *Historia* does seek to position Luther in sacred history, the interest is primarily on Luther the man and his life, and how he influenced the course of Reformation history as a divine agent, and the text thus conforms to this definition of the genre.

Although Antiquity provided a theory of genres dominated by classical notions of the Ideal Form, its ideas were often ignored in practice and they cannot be taken as a prescriptive guide to the genre itself.¹¹⁰ Within genre theory, classical prescription was replaced by descriptive approaches, and the post-structuralist movement encouraged an interest in genre as guide to understanding.¹¹¹ Although criticised for offering little more than a taxonomy,¹¹² Frye stresses the need to identify generic conventions,¹¹³ and subsequent post-structuralist theory has argued that genre is mediated through generic features which provide a contract of expectations between the reader and author on different levels. Hirsch sees that the true genre of a work may be hidden but gradually revealed as reading takes place; initially, genre is shown through the imprecise and vague indication at the broad

¹⁰⁹ Albrecht Dihle, *Studien zur griechischen Biographie*, Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen Philologisch-Historische Klasse, 37 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), p. 11.

¹¹⁰ See, for example, Aristotle's *Poetics*, 1447a-1448a, in D. A. Rummel and M. Winterbottom, ed., *Literary Criticism: The Principal Texts in Translation* (Oxford: OUP, 171), p. 90 & ff.

¹¹¹ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Univ. of Princeton P., 1973; 2000), and Tzvetán Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to Literary Genre* (New York: Cornell Univ. P., 1975).

¹¹² Todorov, *The Fantastic*, p. 18.

¹¹³ Frye, *Anatomy*, p. 96.

genre level, which is subsequently subjected to the controlling conception in the intrinsic genre. The reader engages in the shared contract of expectations with the author which, in turn, are modified by the reader to achieve textual meaning as the actual, unique meaning of the text.¹¹⁴ To adopt post-structuralist terminology, a study of genre enables the decoding of the literary *langue* which as a result leads to the text's meaning as the *parole*; the expectations, defined by generic tradition, facilitate an understanding of the text.

While extant examples of early life-writing represent only a small fraction of the texts originally produced, these form a significant number; this fact and their diversity alongside the absence of prescribed form result in problems of definition. Nevertheless, a study of classical biographical writing generates varying features common across the genre but not necessarily present in every work; it is precisely the combination of these features, the congeries, which constitutes the genre.¹¹⁵ It is these recognisable groupings of pattern and familial resemblance that indicate genre and serve as a basis for comparison to establish genre.

Drawing on post-structuralist theory and Hirsch's approach to genre study, Burridge establishes the common features of Greco-Roman biography, albeit a rather narrow selection, and subsequently uses this as a methodological approach for a comparison with the four canonical gospels. He acknowledges the diversity of the genre and the need for a comprehensive survey if the comparison is to be valid. Initially, however, he cautions against confusion with the modern biographical genre, and to this end champions the term *βίος* as being both more informative and accurate.¹¹⁶ Burridge adopts a three-fold division into form, content and function, although the distinction between content and function is blurred, and identifies the

¹¹⁴ Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, pp. 80-81.

¹¹⁵ William G. Doty, 'The Concept of Genre in Literary Analysis', in *SBL Proceedings 1972: Book of Seminar Papers for 108th Annual Meeting*, ed. by Lane C. McGaughey, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA: SBL, 1972), 2, pp. 413-48.

¹¹⁶ Used from the Hellenistic age onwards, the term 'life' or *βίος* [bios] has been suggested as a more accurate descriptor for Greco-Roman biography; as Burridge indicates, the term 'biography' is both anachronistic and misleading when examining classical and biblical models as the term *biographia* did not appear until Damascius' *Life of Isidorus* in the fifth century AD, but was only preserved by the ninth-century writer, Photius. Therefore, Burridge champions the term *βίος* as both more informative and accurate for an analysis of ancient models and defines *βίος* as a flexible genre with 'strong relationships with history, encomium and rhetoric, moral philosophy and the concern for character' (Burridge, p. 69). By adopting the use of *βίος* for biographical writings in this period, problems of generic expectations can be avoided. For further discussion of this point, see Arnaldo Momigliano, *The Development of Greek Biography* (Harvard: Harvard Univ. P., 1971), p. 12. On the use of *biographia*, see Photius, *Bibliotheca*, 181 and 242, ed. by R. Henry (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1951-91).

four elements that will serve as the methodology for his comparison as: the opening features; the subject; the external features; and the internal features.

By adopting Burridge's methodology, it is possible to analyse the biographical account of Luther's life to assess the similarity with Greco-Roman biography as well the gospels, and whether the narrative structures used by Melanchthon support his explicit interpretation of Luther's life as a divinely-chosen prophet of the Church. In turn, this analysis will show that Melanchthon drew on well-established, highly orthodox narrative structures to depict the history of one of the greatest 'heretics' of ecclesiastical history. Rather than detail Burridge's method in abstract, his mode of analysis will be established *en passant* through its application to Melanchthon's text.¹¹⁷

An in-depth study of the text is important to establish definitively its genre in order to reveal a fuller appreciation not only of the *Historia*'s literary antecedents but also Melanchthon's originality and skill in using such narrative models to author an image of Luther. In turn, this broad definition of the *Historia* will be confirmed through an analysis of the intrinsic genre and the content of the text which will indicate how Melanchthon sought to control the earliest understanding of Luther. The imperative for such a study is all the greater given the influential nature of Melanchthon's text on subsequent historical accounts of the period, in whatever form they have taken; therefore, this study will show how biographical writing and its fictional qualities have dictated historical understanding of the Reformation.

2. Analysis

Title

While many classical texts were only given a title after their production, Burridge accepts that the title of a work, however original, provides a 'master word' to guide later interpretations even when the titles were added by another hand and at a much later date (Burridge, p. 112). In the classical sources used in his analysis, the titles are essentially just the names of the various subjects, although the genre is stressed in some by the use of the term βίος and the subject's name in the genitive case. The

¹¹⁷ Burridge's methodology is given detailed explanation in *What are the Gospels?*, pp. 107-127.

gospels are titled εὐαγγέλιον,¹¹⁸ a noun with religious and salvific connotations in secular Greek from Homer onwards and whose meaning indicates the preaching of the ‘good news’ of Jesus Christ. Burrige develops his argument to show that the term εὐαγγέλιον might be expanded to mean the ‘good news of the whole historical ministry of Jesus’, and that the ‘books [of the canonical gospels] were seen as a literary group together, possibly with a connection to βίος (Burrige, p. 193).

Melanchthon’s text, which itself functions as a preface, is entitled ‘Historia de vita et actis reverendiss. viri D. Mart. Lutheri, verae Theologiae Doctoris, bona fide conscripta, a Philippo Melanthe’ (Aī^r). The use of ‘historia’ as the first word of the title signals the genre clearly, and enables the reader to expect a life of Luther. Importantly, however, the title continues and the addition of ‘vita’ and ‘actis’ provides an indication of Melanchthon’s method in that through a concentration on Luther’s life and deeds, he will demonstrate his subject’s character and his purpose on earth, following the implicit characterological representations found in classical, especially Plutarchan, biography and the gospels. While not the ‘master word’ of the title, the use of ‘vita’ also calls to mind the biographical genre and forms the reader’s expectation. Luther’s own title indicates his status as well as his authority as a doctor of ‘true’ theology, and the veracity of the account is stressed in the closing words. As with the examples of classical βίοί, Luther’s name also appears in the genitive case. Therefore, the overall function of the title is clear in providing an indication that the reader will be provided with a historical narrative describing the life and acts of Luther in which his deeds will demonstrate his character, and this conforms to the classical precedent.

Opening Features

In the classical tradition, the opening features of a βίος serve to signal the genre, and are intended to announce what is being written.¹¹⁹ The opening sentence is often used to open the work itself or to begin a formal preface in which the author explains

¹¹⁸ εὐαγγέλιον [euangelion] from the verb ὑάγγελος [euangelos] means ‘bringing good news’, and occurs repeatedly in the New Testament where the link with preaching is clear; see H. Frankemölle, *Evangelium – Begriff und Gattung: ein Forschungsbericht* (Stuttgart : Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1988; 1994).

¹¹⁹ Donald Earl, ‘Prologue Form in Ancient Historiography’, in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, I (2) (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1972), 842-856 (p. 856).

his reason and purpose in writing the work; the latter was especially common in ancient historiography. In addition, this prologue can also set the scene and suggest the background to the text. The gospels, however, do not share a common style of opening; Mark and Matthew open with a genealogy of Jesus while Luke and John open with a preface. All four gospels use the subject's name at the start or within the opening lines of the text, and in this respect have an affinity with classical biography, as is seen, for example, in the opening to Tacitus's *Agricola*.¹²⁰

Once again, Melanchthon's text reveals a similarity with both the classical and the gospel biographical models. In Policarius's edition of the *Historia*, the title is immediately followed by thirteen distichs which summarise Luther's life from his time at university until his death. Following this, Melanchthon provides a preface in which he establishes his claim to authority on his subject and stresses the veracity of his account, while initiating the nature of his subject's characterisation. In the opening to this preface, Melanchthon cites Luther's name and thus reinforces the notion of Luther as subject. From this opening sentence, it is clear that Melanchthon views Luther as God's agent on earth, 'de beneficiis quae Deus per Lutherum orbi terrarum contulit' (A^r), and this characterisation will be followed consistently throughout the *Historia*; this reinforces Melanchthon's interpretation of Luther given in the funeral eulogy in which he identifies the points of descent in the transmission of the true faith of the church from Isaiah, John the Baptist, Paul, Augustine to Luther.¹²¹ Melanchthon states his regret that Luther never produced an autobiography as it would have provided an exemplum to others as well as acting as a memorial and countering various slanders made of Luther. In this way, Melanchthon follows the classical βίοι and the gospels in employing his subject as a moral example which defines the purpose of the work. In claiming that such an autobiographical account would have countered slander, Melanchthon raises two

¹²⁰ Tacitus, 'Agricola', in *The Agricola and the Germania* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1948; 1970), p. 53.

¹²¹ The eulogy reads: 'Nota series est primorum patrum, Adæ, Seth, Enoch, Mathusalem, Noe,...Hanc continuum seriem iuvat aspicere, quæ est illustre testimonium præsentiæ Dei in Ecclesia...Et lucem Evangelii splendidiorem accensam esse voce Lutheri manifestum est', in Philip Melanchthon, *Oratio funere in reverendi viri D. Martini Lutheri* (Wittenberg: Georg Rhau, 1546), (A3^{v-r}). Melanchthon repeats such sentiments in the *Historia* in casting Luther as the a latter-day prophet who returns the Church to her true state: Gratias igitur agamus Deo aeterno Patri Domini nostri Ihesu Christi, qui Martini Lutheri ministerio ex fontibus Evangelicis rursus eiici coenum et venena voluit, et Ecclesiae puram doctrinam restituit, [...] (Bviii^v). See Melanchthon, 'Oratio uber der Leich D. Martini Lutheri', in *Der unbekannte Melanchthon: Wirken und Denken des Præceptor Germaniæ in neuer Sicht*, ed. by Robert Stupperich (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1961), pp. 220-236; or in *CR*, XI, col. 728.

issues, the denigration of the status of bishops and the question as to whether Luther broke his monastic vows:

[D]einde et calumnias refutaret eorum, qui vel incitatum a principibus viris aut aliis, ut labefactaret Episcoporum dignitatem, vel privata ipsum cupiditate inflammatum, servitutis Monasticae vincula rupisse fingunt. (Aiiii^r)

Thereby, this creates an expectation that these issues will be dealt with in the body of the narrative.

The second part of his preface continues by maintaining that while Luther did not write such an autobiography, had he done so, it would have been done faithfully, ‘tamen et in ipso tantum gravitatis fuisse scimus, ut optima fide Historiam recitaturus fuerit’ (Melanchthon, Av^v). Here, Melanchthon sets out a master characteristic that will govern his entire representation of Luther, namely his steadfastness. Furthermore, Melanchthon’s characterisation of Luther follows the classical and gospel models of characterisation carried out through a representation of acts rather than direct authorial commentary, albeit here in a hypothetical instance. Given that no such autobiography was written, Melanchthon wrote his *Historia* and stresses the authority of his report through his own status as an ‘eyewitness’ as well as the testimony of others who would challenge any unfaithful representation:

Sed quia editionem talis historiae fatalis ipsius dies antevertit, nos iisdem de rebus ea, quae partim ex ipso audivimus, partim ipse vidimus, bona fide recitaturi sumus. (Melanchthon, Av^v)

Melanchthon functions as the omniscient narrator throughout the *Historia* yet also enters occasionally as a first-person narrator to authenticate otherwise anecdotal evidence of Luther’s character, but, importantly, is entirely absent as a character of the text. In this way, Melanchthon’s preface does display clear affinities with the classical and gospel models that would suggest a clear inheritance of one or both narrative forms; indeed, the importance of those things heard and seen calls to mind the gospels’ claim of reliability.¹²² Luther’s status as the subject is clear throughout

¹²² See, for example, Luke 1. 3-4, John 1. 14, John 19. 35, and John 21. 24.

and there are indications of characterisation that is suggestive of the ancient models. At the same time, Melanchthon makes a case for the veracity of his biography and sets out his purpose in writing such an account.

Subject

Although Burridge acknowledges that genre is not determined by subject alone, he does show that within classical literary theory some subjects were more appropriate than others in light of the understanding of decorum; a low comic figure, for example, would be an inappropriate subject for tragedy. In order to establish the subject of a text, Burridge carries out an analysis of the frequency of use of verbal subjects or agents in various case endings in each clause of the text, concluding that the dominant verbal subject is the subject of the work. Burridge cites Homer's *Iliad* as a 'control' and shows that two subjects, Hector and Achilles, dominate while in the pseudo-biographical *Odyssey*, Odysseus has twice the score of any other character.¹²³

In all the classical examples that Burridge provides, he identifies a 'skewing effect' with the concentration on one character as the focus and subject of the work, and concludes that βίος literature is 'characterized by this strong concentration and focus on one person, and this is reflected even in the verbal syntax' (Burridge, p. 163). This marked dominance of one subject is also found in all four gospels, which again Burridge interprets as a strong biographical interest. Unsurprisingly, Melanchthon's *Historia* displays this same 'skew effect' and concentration on Luther throughout. Luther's name is used eighty-six times, in all cases, throughout the text with no other figure scoring a similar result; in fact, the nearest other character is that of the pope who occurs only six times throughout the work, and this character is, in fact, a composite depiction of several popes. These figures do not include, however, subject forms contained in conjugated verbs without additional pronouns or nouns, but do indicate the primary focus given to Luther and the concentration on him as a figure of biographical interest.

¹²³ Homer, *The Illiad*, trans. and ed. by A. T. Murray, 2 vols (London: Heinemann, 1924-25), and *The Odyssey*, trans. and ed. by A. T. Murray, 2 vols (London: Heinemann, 1919). Burridge provides full details of his comparison in his appendix in *What are the Gospels*, pp. 261-274.

In addition, BurrIDGE analyses the allocation of space within the work to demonstrate how the subject is being treated and to show whether any one aspect of the story is dominant. In his analysis of the classical βίοί, BurrIDGE shows that the different authors concentrate on those aspects important to the interior structure of their text, and may provide even coverage of the subject's life or emphasise one particular period at the expense of others. Although biographical connections have previously been denied the gospels due to their lack of information on the first thirty years of Jesus's life, and the concentration on his death, BurrIDGE's analysis shows that this may also be the case for classical βίοί.¹²⁴ All four canonical gospels reveal a concentration on the last week of Jesus's life, but this is important for understanding his significance for the evangelists, and BurrIDGE concludes that the concentration on his death and Passion cannot be used to deny similarities with the classical models.

A combined examination of the *vita* and *acta* in the *Historia* reveals a concentration not just on Luther the man, but also on Luther the theologian. The majority of the text is used to describe, justify and defend Luther's theological position and provides biographical detail to this end. In total, 43% of the entire work deals with Luther's theology, while a further 44% of the text concentrates on a discussion of the Diet of Worms if the *vita* is taken together with the *acta*. No other aspect of Luther's life is given similar attention, and the disproportionate concentration on Worms indicates Melancthon's interpretation of the event as a major turning point in Luther's life, but it is also one in which Luther's defining characteristic emerges forcefully as steadfastness in his faith. The Worms narrative stresses Luther's status as a hero, and like a Passion narrative presents Luther's steadfastness as 'larger than life'.¹²⁵ It is, therefore, all the more significant that the narrative here lacks rhetorical embellishment and Melancthon simply lets the facts speak for themselves. It is precisely this seemingly simple, almost naïve quality of the *Historia* in which fictional narrative has shaped fact and has influenced so much Reformation history through its depiction of truth. Just as the gospels allow the Passion to dominate the narrative as the major interpretative event of Jesus's life, so is Luther's theology in Melancthon's *Historia* seen as the key to understanding his character. This interpretation develops the depiction of Luther in the anonymous

¹²⁴ For further development of this argument, see Graham Stanton, *The Gospels and Jesus* (Oxford: OUP, 1989), p. 19.

¹²⁵ Ralph Keen, 'Philip Melancthon and the historical Luther', p. 13.

pamphlet *Dr Martin Luthers Passion* (1521) in which his appearance at the Diet of Worms and defence of his theological position is cast as a parallel to the Passion of Christ.¹²⁶ In this popular work, the burning of his works represents the execution of Luther's medial body and corresponds to the Crucifixion and draws on salvation history, regarded by many as a backdrop to the events in Worms.

The *vita*'s narrative concentrates entirely on Luther's life and retains a focus on his development and contribution throughout. Within the *vita*, Melanchthon creates narrative units that he uses to structure his story but also to endow his life of Luther with key episodes. Luther's background and family, school, and university education are all accorded 5% of the entire text, while 11% of the narrative is devoted to his life in the Erfurt cloister and approximately 7% describes both his theological studies and teachings respectively. Melanchthon devotes almost a third of the *vita* to the Indulgence controversy (11%) and Luther's subsequent theological writings (23%), and concludes his biography by granting approximately 13% to both Luther's place in church history and to his legacy. While some aspects of the narrative, such as family background and education, are obviously drawn from the *topoi* of classical and Renaissance life-writing, this survey highlights Melanchthon's emphasis on aspects of Luther's life that can be identified in subsequent lives of the reformer. As such, they will form the focus of the subsequent study.

External features

Within the external features, BurrIDGE identifies mode of representation as the first level of analysis. This is the question as to whether the text was designed for oral presentation or as a written text, although he does caution that many classical 'written' texts were, nevertheless, intended to be read aloud. The text might be in the form of prose or verse, and might also be dialogue, drama, disconnected units or continuous narrative. It is also within this category that BurrIDGE assesses the role of the speaker in the text and what relationship he has to the narrated material. BurrIDGE's analysis of classical βίαι shows that they are all in the form of prose narrative, although some are cast in an oral mode and, therefore, have certain

¹²⁶ Johannes Marcellus, *Passio Doctoris Martini Lutheri : Bibliographie, Texte und Untersuchungen*, ed. by Johannes Schilling, Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationgeschichte, 57 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlag & Mohn, 1989).

oratorical features. They are often continuous in form and with the exception of Suetonius follow a chronological order. This is also the case in the gospels where once again a continuous prose narrative is the form, although there is a possible oral tradition behind the texts, and there are of course elements of drama and dialogue within individual gospels.¹²⁷

If the distichs are excluded on the grounds that they were added to the text by another hand, the *Historia* may be considered to be entirely in the form of prose narrative. As a preface to a collection of Luther's works, it was intended as a written document to be read by an individual rather than as a public, oratorical document. Furthermore, within the *Historia*, there are two distinct texts, the *vita* and the *acta*, with a clear division between the two. These two independent sections of the text reflect the different speakers in the *Historia* as a whole. The *vita* has one narrator, Melanchthon, who reports in a third-person continuous prose narrative the details of Luther's life from birth to death. Yet in the *acta*, while the third-person narrator's voice is still audible, there is a significant amount of first-person dialogue in which Luther himself is given voice. It is as if the narrator has absented himself from the text in order to let Luther present his own heroic stand in the 'courtroom drama' of the Diet. The effect of this is to suggest that the episode is too important or too self-evident to require any further embellishment from the narrator; direct mimesis is, therefore, dominant. In the *Historia*, the dominance of the third-person narrator allows a distinct interpretation and image of Luther to emerge, clearly emplotted and authored by Melanchthon, that casts the reformer into a larger eschatological design.

The size of a text was identified by Aristotle as a generic feature, but has often been ignored by modern scholars according to Burridge.¹²⁸ Size is to be characterized by approximate groupings of long, medium length, short, scrolls or sittings. For Burridge, 'short' represents 10 000 words or fewer in classical texts, while 'medium length' texts have between 10 000 and 25 000 words, and 'long' texts more. The classical examples of both earlier and later βίοι, cited by Burridge, all fall within the boundaries of medium length texts. This is also the case for the gospels, with the only other New Testament book falling within the range being Acts

¹²⁷ Burridge, *What are the Gospels*, p. 138, p. 168, and p. 199.

¹²⁸ Aristotle, *Poetics*, IV, 1450b.25 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968); see Burridge, *What are the Gospels*, pp. 117-119.

(18 382).¹²⁹ Size is thus another shared feature between classical βίοι and the gospels. The two parts of the *Historia*, taken together, amount to 10 379 words and thus fall into Burridge's medium-length category, and again support the argument for Melancthon's inheritance from classical biography and the gospels. The *vita* itself numbers 4486 words and falls within the short category.

In terms of the structure of a text, Burridge discusses its organisation and development, as to how it has been sequenced together and whether it follows a chronological, topical or geographical order, and whether the text continuously unfolds or is a series of disparate elements. Finally, he assesses whether a text has a continuous or disjointed narrative that follows a time, a person, an event or a place. In his analysis, classical biography is characterized by a chronological approach from the subject's birth that is often interrupted by topical material which serves to display a dominant characteristic of the subject. With Momigliano, he identifies a return to a chronological narrative and the subject's death as a defining hallmark of the genre.¹³⁰ All the synoptic gospels begin with the baptism of Christ, although Matthew and Luke preface this with an account of Jesus's birth, and conclude with the Passion. In between, the focus of the narrative is on Jesus's ministry and here material is ordered topically as well as chronologically, but the overall flow of the narrative is from Jesus's baptism to his Passion, which in turn explains the significance of his life. In addition, the narratives are marked by a geographical progression from Galilee to Jerusalem. John's Gospel begins with the calling of the disciples, but thereafter follows Jesus through his ministry to his Passion. The overall framework of the gospels is, therefore, one of chronological and geographical progression with topical inserts and discourse. In this way, the gospels have an exterior framework that is reminiscent of Greco-Roman βίοι.

In the *vita* of the *Historia*, the structure of the text pursues a chronological framework that begins with Luther's ancestry and birth, follows him through his education to his life in the cloister and his early theological writings. At this mid-point in the *vita*, the reader is then introduced to Luther's 'ministry' and his subsequent clash with the Roman Catholic Church. Out of this grows Luther's

¹²⁹ The data for the gospels are as follows: Matthew (18 305 words); Mark (11 242 words); Luke (19 428 words); and John (15 426 words). All data are taken from Robert Morgenthaler, *Statistik des neutestamentlichen Wortschatzes* (Zürich: Gotthelf, 1958), Table 3, p. 164.

¹³⁰ See Arnaldo Momigliano, *The Development of Greek Biography: Four Lectures* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 80, and Burridge, *What are the Gospels*, p. 140.

essential theology and the narrative continues quickly to Luther's death. The logic of the *vita*'s narrative, therefore, has Luther's break with Rome at its heart, out of which the Reformer Luther and the distinctly Lutheran theology grow. This chronological structure is, however, interrupted by the topical insert of the *acta* which does not focus on Luther's deeds throughout his adult life, but centres instead exclusively on his actions at the Diet of Worms, at the heart of which structure stands Luther's explanation and defence of his theology. Following the classical and gospel models once again, the *acta* narrative returns to a depiction of Luther's death. The sequence of the narratives of both the *vita* and the *acta* are ordered so that Luther's thought is the logical focus; and in this way, Melanchthon's *Historia* displays affinities with the classical and gospel models, and especially the former dealing with philosophers. Significantly, the narrative progression suggests that the break with Rome began for Melanchthon at the posting of the Ninety-Five Theses and is the major event of the Luther story.

Scale is used to describe the focus of a text; whether it concentrates on a single individual or whether it tries to incorporate many different people and events. The general scale of the classical βίοι is relatively narrow and focuses on the subject of the work and his concerns, although exceptions to this generalisation do of course exist, in the *Agricola* for example. Scale in the gospels is obviously narrow, concentrating almost exclusively on Jesus who is nearly always the focus of the narrative. When he is 'physically' absent from the narrative, other characters are discussing him and thus these other characters are only shown in relation to Jesus.¹³¹ Again, Burridge sees the narrowness of scale as another link between the gospels and βίοι. Melanchthon's *Historia* does not differ in this respect, with Luther the man or his theology the focus throughout. Indeed, as has already been shown, the concentration on Luther's thoughts is greater in the narrative than a depiction of his life, and indicates that it is this conceptual representation that is the true purpose of

¹³¹ The most obvious examples of Jesus's absence from the gospel narratives are in John the Baptist's pre-figuration of the Messiah (Matthew 11. 2 and 14. 1-12; Mark 4. 14-29; and Luke 3) and in the period following the crucifixion where Joseph of Arimathea's character is indicated (Matthew 27. 56-60; Mark 15. 43-47; Luke 23. 50; and John 19. 38) as well as that of Mary Magdalene (Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; and John 20). Jesus is of course absent from the gospel narratives that deal with Judas's betrayal of him (Matthew 26. 14-16 and 27. 1-5) and once again such units demonstrate the reaction of others to Christ or develop the narrative. Peter's repeated denial of Christ offers a dual insight into Jesus's prophecy as well as Peter's own character (Mark 14. 53 and 69-72; Luke 22. 57-63; John 18. 25-27). An exposition of Jesus's character and his teachings is of course shown in the remaining books of the New Testament while he himself is physically absent from the narrative.

the narrative; thus, the subtextual message is that Luther lives on in his theological legacy beyond death.

Within the category of external features, Burridge identifies literary units as part of the structure of a text and which include prologue, preface, speeches, dialogue, anecdotes, maxims, discourses, catalogues, stories, songs, choral interludes, physical and geographical descriptions; these individual units may be carefully connected or may appear in a more disjointed fashion. While such units are not determinative of genre, Burridge argues that their selection and pattern of usage may indicate genre. In the βίοι chosen, one of the most important literary units to emerge is anecdote, often in the form of a brief biographical narrative that relates a striking or unusual feature of the hero's character, along with sayings and stories, which together form the characteristic units of the genre. In the synoptic gospels, the combination of stories, sayings and speeches is again redolent of classical biography, although these can be subdivided into scholastic and biographical apophthegms, sayings, miracle stories, historical stories and legends. In John, Burridge shows that there are only three main types of unit: stories, dialogue, and discourse, and again these are typical of βίοι (Burridge, p. 147).

While the majority of the *vita* takes the form of reporting narrative with some commentary, Melanchthon does employ other literary units in his account. The work opens with a preface in which he laments the lack of a Luther autobiography and much of the subsequent account contains much personal reportage cast as objective narrative. Given the eyewitness nature of the account, it is hardly surprising that anecdote is a common feature of the *Historia*. Anecdotal references take the form of short narratives, often based on personal experience, which demonstrate an aspect of the subject's character. One of the more striking examples within the account is that of the description of Luther in the monastery. Here, Melanchthon recalls how little Luther ate and drank and yet remained strong in body:

Erat autem natura, quod saepe miratus sum, in corpore nec parvo nec imbecilli, valde modici cibi et potus, vidi continuis quatuor diebus, cum quidem recte valeret, prorsus nihil edentem aut bibentem, vidi saepe alias multis diebus quotidie exiguo pane et halece contentum esse. (Avii^v)

The use of anecdote supports Melanchthon's depiction of Luther's piety and self-discipline by providing eyewitness testimony which at the same time has certain affinities with the hagiographical tradition of saints who eat little, if anything, and whose survival without food reinforces their beatific status. The choice of herring, *halece*, recalls the staple diet of the pious on fast days as well as the ascetic practices of hermits.¹³² This representation of Luther's food, itself somewhat intimate knowledge, highlights the generic conventions within which Melanchthon is working.

Melanchthon draws on a *topos* that is characterological and typical of the subject from one generic tradition; the foodstuff hints at Luther's piety and the reader understands his character as an example of a type, the saint. Significantly, this anecdote allows Melanchthon to shift voice from that of the 'objective' third-person narrator to an involved first-person witness, personally testifying to Luther's saintly and miraculous qualities.

A further use of anecdote in the *vita* is the representation of the 'old man' in the Erfurt monastery who helped guide Luther. Here, the narrative is vague about who this man is, but it makes clear the help he gives to Luther. It is, in fact, this 'old man' who consoles Luther and helps inform his theology; the effect of this is to suggest a divine messenger announcing God's message:

Et senis cuiusdam sermonibus in Augustiniano Collegio Erphordiae saepe se confirmatum esse narrabat, cui cum consternationes suas exponeret, audivit eum de fide multa disserentem, seque deductum aiebat ad Symbolum, in quo dicitur, Credo remissionem peccatorum. Hunc Articulum sic ille interpretaetus erat non solum in genere credendum esse, aliquibus remitti, ut et Daemones credunt, Davidi aut Petro remitti, Sed mandatum Dei esse, ut singuli homines remitti nobis peccata credamus. (Avii^r)

¹³² On the diet of late-medieval and early-modern society, see Jason König, *Saints and Symposiasts: The Literature of Food and the Symposium in Greco-Roman and early Christian Culture* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), pp. 322-326, and Brian Fagan, *Fish on Friday: Feasting, Fasting and the Discovery of the New World* (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

This use of anecdote is reinforced by the old man's status as a *topos* of a divine messenger, familiar from hagiography and the Gospels,¹³³ which suggests Luther's own divine favour.

Melanchthon also uses a large amount of reportage narrative to present information he has acquired and which again illustrates something of Luther the man; one such example of this is the description of Luther's parents. While any representation of his parents does not have a direct bearing on Luther, it indirectly explains his ancestry which in turn is suggestive of his character. Initially using a reportage narrative, Melanchthon tells of Hans Luther's status as a magistrate who was cherished for his integrity, 'propter intergritatem omnibus bonis viris carissimus fuit' (Av^v). The mother, on the other hand, emerges as a paragon of virtue to whom other women look for an example:

In matre Margarita, coniuge Iohannis Lutheri, cum coeterae erant virtutes honestae Matronae convenientes, tum vero praecipue lucebant pudicitia, timor Dei, et invocatio, intuebanturque, in eam coeterae honestae mulieres, ut in exemplar virtutum. (Av^{v-r})

Melanchthon is, of course, careful in selecting his depiction of the parents, and the effect of such a narrative is to suggest that Luther has inherited the same characteristics displayed by his parents. Throughout the *vita*, Melanchthon adds various sayings of Luther's and stories about Luther's life. Yet it is Melanchthon's use of anecdote, perhaps, that reminds the reader most of the possible models for his account.

Classical authors, Burridge shows, drew on a variety of different texts as sources for βίοί, from historical documents, archives, letters, treatises, histories, and other biographies. At the same time, the oral tradition of transmitting information was highly respected in a less literate society, and memory, both personal and collective, served equally as a reputable source for historical writing. The use of sources in the classical tradition cannot, however, be viewed as determinative, although Burridge argues that there may be a typical range of sources within a genre.

¹³³ See, for example, Germanus's dream before in which he is visited by a divine messenger as a prefiguration of his elevation to bishop: '[...] a quondam sene claves portae Parisiacae porrigi', in *Passiones vitaeque sanctorum aevi Merovingici*, ed. by Bruno Krusch and Wilhelm Levinson, *MGH SRM* (Hannover; Leipzig: Hahn, 1920), 7.1, p. 380.

Burridge further characterises the βίοι by their variety of source documents and their selective use of that information to fit their interpretative aim. While there are differences between the synoptic gospels and John, Burridge argues that the Evangelists had access to a wide variety of sources which they approached creatively and which were edited to fit their theology. John's gospel, in particular, was written to 'articulate a Christian tradition in such a manner as to address it with new relevance to a given community'.¹³⁴ In the same way that the authors of classical biography or the Evangelists had the freedom to select and organise sources and 'facts', especially when working from an oral tradition, so did Melanchthon. In the *Historia*, Melanchthon relies heavily on personal reminiscence, tradition, anecdote, and Luther's own sayings and writings in a way alien to modern historical scholarship. The text indicates that he has attempted to validate his 'facts', but the overall portrait remains subjective and again forms a point of similarity with the βίος and gospel traditions.

Methods of Characterization

Initially, form critics denied any link between classical biography and the gospels due to the absence of character analysis in the gospels.¹³⁵ Within the context of the external features of the text, characterization is the means by which the author develops his image of the characters. While detailed direct character analysis is lacking in both the gospels and βίοι, information on the character of the subject is provided indirectly through his words and deeds, especially the latter. Some commentary can be given in the text, however, and this is often done in order to make the point clearer. For this reason, both earlier and later βίοι tend to concentrate on a narrative of an individual's actions and rely on descriptive means of characterization. Moreover, Plutarch stresses the significance of smaller deeds as indicators of character that are just as important as large acts:

Now, since we must not pass over even the slight tokens of character when we are delineating as it were the likeness of the soul, the story goes that on this

¹³⁴ Robert Kysar, *The Fourth Evangelist and His Gospel: An Examination of Contemporary Scholarship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1975), p. 81.

¹³⁵ Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. by John Marsh (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963), p. 372.

occasion, when Caesar was eagerly engaged in a great struggle with Cato and the attention of the senate was fixed upon the two men, a little note was brought in from outside to Caesar.¹³⁶

In particular, character is shown through anecdote, sayings and stories, and even in Suetonius's topical approach, this method is largely followed.

Just as with the classical texts, the gospels adopt this method of indirect characterization through a narrative of deeds. The image of Jesus is built up through a mixture of stories, anecdotes, and sayings. Equally, other characters are portrayed through their reaction to Jesus. Therefore, while direct characterization is lacking in the gospels, the indirect method of depicting character forms another link with βίοι.

Melanchthon's *Historia* presents only one main character to the reader and that is of course Luther. Other characters, such as his family, Tetzel, and the pope are present but they only gain significance through their relationship to the subject and what they reveal of his personality. In terms of its characterization, the *Historia* follows the method found in both βίοι and the gospels: character is revealed through a representation of the subject's deeds. These deeds are not restricted to the great acts of Luther's life, and Melanchthon again draws on the classical model of anecdotes and minor incidents that serve to demonstrate Luther's character. Melanchthon does, nevertheless, offer direct characterization either through the narratorial voice or through the mouths of other characters in order to clarify his argument. These two methods of characterization combine to create a harmonious image of the subject in which what is said of him by both the narrator and other characters is consistent with his actions as narrated in the text.

Therefore, while Melanchthon's *Historia* does not fully adhere to the ancient models of biography, in that it does provide some direct commentary on characterisation, it does nevertheless follow the principle found in both βίοι and the gospels of revealing character through the deeds of the subject. These deeds are visible in anecdotes that serve to demonstrate important aspects of the subject's personality in short, independent literary units. Furthermore, Melanchthon's characterization of Luther does remain faithful to the narrative model in its static

¹³⁶ Plutarch, 'Cato the Younger', 24.1, in *Plutarch's Lives*, VIII (11 vols), ed. and trans. by Bernadotte Perrin (London: Heinemann; Loeb, 1919), p. 291.

depiction of his character that does not alter fundamentally throughout the course of his life.

Internal features

Setting

Within the category of internal features, Burridge identifies setting as a convenient point to begin analysis. In classical literature, literary conventions lead the reader to expect a certain genre if certain settings are used; for example, if the work opens with the action under a shady tree, the reader might expect a pastoral genre. While not all genres are marked by such clear geographical locations, setting raises the question of who is the focus of narrative sequences and how those are structured. Although the geographical settings of classical βίοι vary greatly, the location is always where the subject was active; unsurprisingly so given that the focus is almost always on the subject of the work. The geography only changes if the subject is actively mobile. Burridge argues that this ‘constant internal focus on the subject’ dictates the content and the setting of the individual scenes. In terms of the dramatic setting, the subject is usually present throughout and even when absent dominates action, as for example in the *Agricola* or Suetonius where the topical arrangement guarantees that the subject is the centre of attention; in this way, the subject often forms the unifying principle of the work. The gospels function largely in the same way, following Jesus’s movements from Galilee to Jerusalem. Jesus is continually ‘centre stage’ and most scenes involve him, or at least focus on him even in his absence, as for example in the verses of the gospels that deal with John the Baptist.¹³⁷ This concentration on the subject of the work and almost exclusive focus on his location is another typical feature that unites the gospels and classical βίοι.

It is precisely this concentration on the subject’s setting that the reader meets in the *Historia*. The spotlight never leaves Luther and wherever he is, the setting remains. The opening of the text, which provides information on Luther’s family and ancestry, suggests a national hero: a man of humble and poor birth who will rise to

¹³⁷ See Matthew 11. 2 and 14. 1-12, Mark 4. 14-29, and Luke 3. For further examples of Jesus’s absence from the gospels, see above, p. 50, note 131.

greater things. The stressing of the family's static links to the Mansfeld area reinforces the notion that Luther is a local, German hero, and reflects the larger desire to create a national history. Thereafter, the setting remains with Luther and follows him through school, university and to the monastery. Yet it is once Luther arrives in Wittenberg that he begins to mature fully and to develop into the reformer:

Hic inter quotidiana exercitia Scholae et concionum, magis etiam lucere eius ingenium coepit. Cumque eum attente audirent viri sapientes, Doctor Martinus Mellerstadius et alii, saepe dixit Mellerstadius, tantam esse vim ingenii in hoc viro, ut plane praesagiret mutaturum esse vulgare doctrinae genus, quod tunc in Scholis unicum tradebatur. (Aviii^r)

Once transferred to Wittenberg, the narrative follows Luther's rise to notoriety and his subsequent controversy with the Roman Catholic Church. This romance-like quest sees Luther move from town to town until he reaches his spiritual home in Wittenberg and comes into fulfilment.

At the same time, the focus of the narrative never leaves Luther. The reader is introduced to the figure of Luther by way of his ancestry and family, and thereafter Luther dominates the entire narrative focus of the work. When the narrative leaves Luther the man, it remains with his thoughts and teachings, and Luther's intellect thus becomes the subject. Two types of scene are used throughout the work; active and didactic. The active scenes show Luther doing something and thereby reveal something of his character; while the didactic scenes show Luther teaching or engaged in debate and thereby reveal his thoughts and theology as well as the man. This division reflects the work as a whole which seeks to demonstrate Luther the man as well as Luther the theologian.

Topics

Certain motifs indicate genre through their regular occurrence. For example in New Comedy, the rich child abandoned at birth, raised by poor yokels, and who slowly realises his true identity is a standard motif of the genre. The use of a standard *topos* at the start of a work can be used to highlight the genre immediately to the reader,

although they cannot be viewed as prescriptive.¹³⁸ The early βίοι are marked by a repetition of certain *topoi*, conveniently listed by Nepos at the start of *Epaminondas*,¹³⁹ most of which occur in Burridge's selection of texts: the subject's ancestry; his birth; boyhood and education; great deeds; virtues; his death and its consequences. These standard *topoi* do not all occur in every work, with each author varying his selection according to his subject. Such *topoi* are mirrored in Burridge's later texts and indicate a 'common tradition'.¹⁴⁰ While the gospels do not adhere strictly to the classical *topoi* and there are differences between each text, they do all present a significant number of the motifs that lead Burridge to conclude that they share a similar range of *topoi* (Burridge, p. 232).

As with the classical and gospel narrative models, Melancthon's *Historia* draws on the *topoi* common to the genre. In the opening phases of the narrative, he provides an outline of his subject's ancestry that begins with the Luthers' status as an old family, '[v]etus familia est, et late propagata mediocrium hominum, cognomine Luther, in ditione inclytorum Comitum Manssfeldensium' (Av^v). He goes on to establish the pedigree of the family's Saxon roots, in part through the mother's own family in Eisenach, 'honesta et veteri familia' (Avi^v), and thereby stresses the teutonic nature of the family and establishes the *Historia* as a German narrative. As already discussed, the representation of Hans and Margarethe Luther acts with the general origin of the family as a prefiguration of Luther's own virtues: Luther is a German figure from a family of integrity and virtue.

The *topos* of Luther's birth is also present in the text and, as may be found in the classical models, is shrouded with uncertainty despite the author's attempts to clarify details. This has the effect of providing Luther's origins with an enigmatic air, found in βίοι. As with the description of his family, Luther's boyhood and education are also used as a way of prefiguring his adult qualities. This connects with the classical view of a static character in which personality existed as a constant, present at birth. The representation of Luther in this period is marked by

¹³⁸ See Francis Cairns, *Generic Composition in Greek and Roman Poetry* (Edinburgh: Univ. P., 1972), pp. 6, 25, 99-100.

¹³⁹ Quae re dicemus primum de genere eius, deinde quibus disciplinis et a quibus sit eruditus, tum de maribus ingenique facultatibus et si qua alia memoria digna erunt, postremo de rebus gestis, quae a plurimis animi anteponuntur virtutibus: Cornelius Nepos, 'Epaminondas', 1.4, in 'De viris illustribus', XV, trans. by John C. Rolfe (London: Heinemann; Loeb, 1984), p. 167.

¹⁴⁰ Graham Anderson, *Studies in Lucian's Comic Fiction*, Mnemosyne Supplementum, 43 (Leiden: Brill, 1976), p. 93.

adjectives and descriptors of excellence, ‘vis ingenii acerrima esset, et imprimis ad eloquentiam idonea’, ‘tanta vis ingenii’, ‘sagacitate ingenii’ and ‘in iuventute eminebat’ (Avi^{v-r}), and he emerges as a highly intelligent young man with a gift of eloquence and intelligence. These characteristics, which Melanchthon will develop further in his description of Luther’s adulthood, also connect more closely with the gospel tradition and remind the reader of Luke’s depiction of Jesus as gifted at debate.¹⁴¹

The bulk of Melanchthon’s narrative concentrates on Luther’s life as an adult, however, and this is again consistent with the ancient models as well as Renaissance biography. In this way, Melanchthon is able to incorporate the other common *topoi* of virtues identified by Burridge, and let these emerge through his representation. It is Luther’s deeds of his later life that will demonstrate his character most clearly and it is, therefore, to be expected that Melanchthon will focus his efforts on this period of Luther’s life. The account of Luther’s life found in the *vita* closes with a stock *topos* of the genre, namely Luther’s death. This is, however, described with little narrative embellishment, and Melanchthon is satisfied to report Luther’s death during prayer.

Haec quotidie praecantem et Lutherum audiebamus, et inter haec vota anima eius ex mortali corpore placide evocata est, cum iam ageret annum sexagesimum tertium. (Ci^f)

Therefore, the *topoi* illustrate Luther and structure the narrative to indicate that Melanchthon is working within the tradition of βίοι.

Style

Burridge shows that while style varies throughout the classical genre, it may be divided into three broad categories, high, middle and low; he characterises the varying works by the vocabulary and language, the use of technical, educated language for example, or by characters who may indicate different levels, such as the tragic hero or the buffoon. In the later classical examples, the evidence of rhetorical

¹⁴¹ See, for example, Luke 4 and 13.

training is more obvious and again reflects a more elevated style, as well as indications of the text's use in public readings by the insertion of pithy epigrams at the end of a section. His analysis of texts does suggest, however, that while more popular βίοι were written, posterity has predominantly preserved more formal and highbrow writings. Although the style of the gospels is more idiosyncratic, each individual gospel does reveal an awareness of a variety of Greek styles from the more popular, Koiné, to more formal usage, including Semitisms. In this way, Burridge argues that the gospels' style should not be seen as entirely peculiar (Burridge, p. 211).

As might be expected, the style of Melanchthon's text is essentially elevated and provides a formal account of a movement's leader and hero. The language, both in terms of its vocabulary and style, reflects an educated author writing within and for an educated readership. Unlike the classical texts, Melanchthon's text as a preface to Luther's works was meant to be read by an individual rather than at a public reading, and this individual would have required an advanced education to read the Latin text as well appreciate the allusions and the Greek references and usage in the text:

Ornatus igitur gradu Magisterii Philosophici, cum natus esset annum
vicesimum, de consilio propinquorum, qui hanc tantam vim ingenii et
facundiam iudicabant in lucem et ad Rempublicam educendam esse, inchoat
iuris studium. (Avi^r)

The reference to Luther being 'decorated' with his degree as well as to his being brought out into the service of the Republic both suggests and adopts the language of classical learning. The subtle references that draw on other traditions, for example the anecdote of Luther eating but a little fish, also indicate the learning of the readership which is supposed to have understood the significance of the statement and which must have been familiar with the hagiographical tradition. The setting of the work, therefore, is another point that demonstrates a link between Melanchthon's text and βίοι.

Atmosphere

In order to define the atmosphere of a text, Burridge identifies four areas of analysis: the tone; mood; attitude; and values of a work. The flexibility of the genre in classical βίοι enables a great variety of atmosphere to be created depending on the intention of the author, although the examples offered by Burridge as typical generally create an impression of importance towards the subject matter. The texts are often serious and openly encomiastic, seeking to provide a model for emulation. The subject does not always escape criticism, however, and the depiction of a negative aspect can sometimes be used to serve positive ends. The values represented by the text generally reflect the societies in which the texts were produced and are thus often connected to the subjects' lives. Unsurprisingly, the gospels have a more serious tone that is more fitting for such serious religious works. It is clear that what is being written is important to the author and this should also be the case for the reader. The mood of the texts is heavily connected to the actions of the subject, and thus what affects him affects the atmosphere of the texts as a whole. The attitude throughout the canonical gospels is reverential and expectant, almost requiring a response from the reader. These are didactic texts that represent the values of a religious community for whom they provide instruction.

Given the encomiastic nature of the text, the tone of the *Historia* is naturally serious and suggests importance. Melancthon's own admiration for Luther is reflected throughout and the text reinforces the belief that Luther's character is heroic and worthy of admiration. The mood, however, varies according to the experiences of the subject and mirrors the setting in the way it is subject-determined; the narrative's mood will always reflect Luther's actions and encounters. At the start of the text, the mood is clearly laudatory in the description of Luther as a child or a university student, yet this mood shifts to a serious tone on Luther's entry to the monastery and the adoption of the religious life. Throughout the sections of the narrative dealing with theological controversy, the narrative assumes a defensive mood in support of Luther's cause until changing once again to a mournful mood at the end of Luther's life. This subject-focused shifting of mood is consistent with the classical biographical and gospel models, and reveals, therefore, a further indication of the text's inheritance, while at the same time reflecting the nature of the subject himself.

The attitude displayed in the text is one that would be expected from Luther's close friend and one of the most senior figures in the Lutheran Church by 1548; the attitude is reverential and suggests the reader should know about the subject as well as recognise his quasi-divine status. This attitude is clearly encomiastic and aims to impart information on this important figure. Finally, the values shown in the text suggest, as the gospels do, that these are the shared values of a religious community; Melanchthon is providing information for members of the Lutheran movement and establishing an official Wittenberg portrait of Luther, rather than writing conversion literature for outsiders. The values are shared by the author and the subject, shown in Melanchthon's continual defence of Luther's actions, and this expresses the closeness of their own relationship.

Quality of Characterization

While the method of characterization is an external feature of the text, the quality of characterization is internal and addresses the question of realism or accuracy of the subject's depiction. The notion of a realistic portrayal of character in classical texts is problematic, however, given the understanding of character as a fixed and immutable attribute from birth. The question of the unchanging character is linked to the notion that history has a lasting value precisely because the universal nature of character does not change, and it is, therefore, possible for future generations to learn from the past.¹⁴² Broadly speaking, the authors of βίοι are selective in their use of sources in order to provide a particular picture of the subject which, together with encomiastic elements, predisposes them to stereotypic characterization. This lack of individuality in characters is supported by an understanding of character in which the individual is an example of a type and a possessor of shared qualities rather than unique. Nevertheless, there is some evidence of development of character over time in Plutarch that runs contrary to the general classical understanding of character.¹⁴³

The characterization of Jesus found in the gospels is heavily influenced by the belief in Jesus as the son of God. A realistic portrayal is not required and the stress on Jesus's divinity affects a human representation. In the synoptic gospels,

¹⁴² Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, I.22.4, trans. by Charles Forster Smith (London: Heinemann; Loeb, 1920).

¹⁴³ As is shown in the change in Philip V's character in 'Aratus', 51.4 and 54.2, in *Plutarch's Lives*, XI (11 vols), trans. by Bernadotte Perrin (London: Heinemann; Loeb, 1916).

there are elements of stereotypes in Jesus's portrayal, with Mark casting him as an enigmatic miracle-worker, Matthew the Jewish Jesus in continuity with Israel while Luke stresses Jesus the man concerned with the outcasts in society. These depictions oppose a sense of the unreality found in John where a large amount of Johannine theology uttered by Jesus is placed in direct opposition to the more human depiction given of Jesus's human needs, for example in John 4. 6-7, 11. 35 and 11. 33-38.¹⁴⁴ The overall effect of this is to create a tension between the human and the divine Jesus. Nevertheless, Burridge argues that such a portrayal is not removed from the mixture of stereotype and reality found in βίοι (Burridge, p. 234).

In terms of the quality of Melanchthon's portrayal of Luther, the question of realism is of lesser significance than the overall nature of the depiction. Other characters are present in the text, such as Luther's parents, Tetzel and the pope, although the latter is a composite image of at least four popes cast as a metonym for the institution, but the focus of the narrative remains on Luther. While Melanchthon makes clear in the preface that he wishes to achieve as realistic or true a representation of Luther as possible, it is difficult to assess if this has been achieved or not. He does, however, create an image of the reformer that is both very human as well as having traces of the divine, and this subtextual depiction tallies with Melanchthon's overt interpretation of Luther as a prophet of the Church.

Melanchthon opens his account of Luther's life with a discussion of his subject's family origins and its pedigree. Melanchthon makes clear that the Luthers were a good Saxon family and establishes their German credentials. Yet it is in his description of Hans and Margarethe Luther that he begins indirectly his portrayal of Luther by casting the father as a man of integrity and the mother as a paragon of virtue and piety, thereby following hagiographical tradition. These characteristics, identified in his parents, act as proleptors for Luther's own character that Melanchthon develops throughout his account:

[U]bi pater Iohannes Lutherus et Magistratus gessit, et propter intergritatem omnibus bonis viris carissimus fuit... In matre Margarita, coniuge Iohannis

¹⁴⁴ For an exploration of John's portrait of Jesus, see Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in Light of Chapter 17* (London: SCM, 1968); Günther Bornkamm offers a critique of Käsemann's study in 'Towards the Interpretation of John's Gospel: A Discussion of *The Testament of Jesus* by Ernst Käsemann', in *The Interpretation of John*, ed. by John Ashton (London: SPCK, 1986), pp. 79-98.

Lutheri, cum coeterae erant virtutes honestae Matronae convenientes, tum vero praecipue lucebant pudicitia, timor Dei, et invocatio, intuebanturque, in eam coeterae honestae mulieres, ut in exemplar virtutum. (Av^r)

While Melanchthon never makes the connection between Luther's parents and Luther himself, he does identify the same traits in Jakob, Luther's brother, 'vir honestus et integer' (Av^r). This connection between the characteristics of the parents, possibly the evidence of direct testimony but more likely anachronistically back-projected on them as a result of Melanchthon's own interpretation of Luther's character, are understood as static concepts that combine to create Luther's personality and which are seen to determine his own nature; the reality of such a depiction is, however, questionable. In the same way, Melanchthon depicts Luther as a pupil in order to represent determinative aspects of his later character as well as following a stock *topos* of humanist biography. Luther is shown to be intelligent, eloquent and well-read to a level above the standard of his peers. These characteristics, described in a third person narrative and testified to by various witnesses, emerge once again when Luther has already entered the monastery and has begun his biblical studies:

Non igitur paupertas, sed studium pietatis eum in illud viae monasticae genus induxit, in quo etsi doctrinam in scholis usitatam quotidie discebat, et Sententiariorum legebat, et in Disputationibus publicis labyrinthos aliis inextricabiles, diserte multis admirantibus explicabat, tamen quia in eo vitae genere non famam ingenii, sed alimenta pietatis quaerebat, haec studia tanquam parerga tractabat, et facile arripiebat illas scholasticas methodos. Interea fontes doctrinae caelestis avidè legebat ipse, scilicet scripta Prophetica et Apostolica, ut mentem suam de Dei voluntate erudiret, et firmis testimoniis aleret timorem et fidem. Hoc studium ut magis expeterat, illis suis doloribus et pavoribus movebatur. (Avii^r)

Thus, Melanchthon's understanding of personality follows the model found in classical βίοι and the gospels of unchanging and constant characters; Luther's personality is seen as static and non-developmental. Melanchthon provides sufficient examples of Luther's basic nature as proleptors of Luther's status as a divine agent.

The inclusion of negative aspects of Luther's character, however, deliberately and artfully individualises the representation to achieve a distinct interpretative aim.

An indication of Luther's character is again given towards the end of the *Historia* where Melanchthon provides a catalogue of witnesses to the true faith beginning with Origen and continuing through Augustine, Prosper, Maximus, Hugo, Bernard and finally to Luther. This emplotment of Luther at the end of a chain not only establishes his orthodox credentials beside such figures, but also narratively grants him the status of a contemporary father of the Church who arrives to present the true Word of God. Moreover, drawing on the argument of a Church suffering from decline and decadence, Melanchthon regards Luther as the saviour of the fallen church:

Gratias igitur agamus Deo aeterno Patri Domini nostri Ihesu Christi, qui Martini Lutheri ministerio ex fontibus Evangelicis rursus eiici coenum et venena voluit, et Ecclesiae puram doctrinam restituit, [...]. (Bviii^r)

Luther is thus seen in the active service of God restoring the Gospel and calling men to penance. This emplotment and narrative justification of Luther's actions is supported by the incorporation of Scripture into the body of the text which has the effect of connecting Luther with the very voice of God.

Furthermore, in a way similar to classical biographies of teachers and the gospels, Melanchthon highlights the fact that Luther's character is only truly accessible and knowable through a reading of his works. In addition, Melanchthon provides Luther with greater status by casting him almost as an Old Testament prophet who proclaims the Word of God:

Haec merita esse magna omnes piae mentes intelligunt, sed profecto utilitate et labore aequat haec opera, interpretatio veteris et novi Testamenti, in qua tanta est perspicuitas, ut vice Commentarii esse possit ipsa germanica lectio, [...] Volebat enim Lutherus non detinere in suis scriptis, sed ad fontes deducere omnium mentes. Ipsam vocem Dei audire nos voluit, hac voluit in multis accendi veram fidem et invocationem, ut Deus vere celebraretur, et multi fierent haeredes vitae aeternae. (Ci^r-Cii^v)

This preservation of memory and understanding through the teacher's recorded word are typical of the gospels and philosophers' biographies, and the text displays again a familiarity with the ancient narrative models.

Overall therefore, Melanchthon's depiction of Luther's character is commensurate with his interpretation of Luther the man; namely that Melanchthon's view of Luther as a prophetic or saintly figure of ecclesiastical history is reinforced through a variety of narrative features that combine to create an image of the reformer as an orthodox and legitimate, divine representative.

Social Setting and Occasion

The social setting of the text indicates the readership and occasion for which the text was written. Again, while not in itself determinative, Burridge argues that similar settings may be found within a genre (Burridge, p. 125). The βίοι selected by Burridge all reveal a setting within the educated and ruling classes, and the texts serve a memorial and didactic purpose in providing information about the subject's life. This is also the case with the examples of later classical biography used by Burridge, although there is evidence that some of these βίοι enjoyed a more popular setting. Traditionally, the social setting for the gospels has been viewed as rather lowly, although this view is being increasingly reconsidered and an urban, lower middle class readership is now considered a possibility.¹⁴⁵ While there are differences in the gospels, the diversity in the settings and occasions of their production does not, for Burridge, prevent them from being βίοι (Burridge, p. 214), and they share a common desire to tell Jesus's story whatever individual event occasioned their production.

Unsurprisingly, Melanchthon's *Historia* presents similarities again with the classical model. While the *Historia* was subsequently published as a separate and free-standing entity, it appeared initially as introductory matter to a collection of Luther's works and was to be read by an individual rather than being a communal text to be read aloud. The anticipated readership was doubtlessly a wealthy, well-educated middle class, most probably consisting of university students, Lutheran

¹⁴⁵ See the discussion of this by George Kennedy, 'Classical and Christian Source Criticism', in *The Relationships among the Gospels: An Inter-Disciplinary Dialogue*, ed. by W. O. Walker, Jr, Trinity University Monograph Series in Religion, 5 (San Antonio, TEX: Trinity Univ. P., 1978), p. 185.

clergymen, and magistrates able to cope with both the linguistic demands of the Latin text as well as the conceptual arguments in Luther's own writings.¹⁴⁶

The *Historia* also serves as a memorial to its subject providing not only information but also seeking to correct false reports about him to subsequent generations, although the author clearly indicates that Luther can only truly be known through a reading of his own works. Therefore, the *Historia* demonstrates a certain affinity with βίοι in its more formal setting and the elevated nature of the text. Just as with the gospels, its production was occasioned by the life of its subject which is viewed as divinely-willed; as such, there is a sense that a reading of the *Historia* represents an act of popular piety, albeit among an educated level of society.

Authorial Intention and Purpose

The author's intention is according to Burridge 'essential to any concept of genre as a set of expectations or contract between the author and the reader' (Burridge, p. 125). While some genres have a single purpose, others have several, and these may not always be expressed in the preface. The author's expressed aim may not, however, always tally with his purpose as it emerges in the text. In the βίοι analysed, several possible purposes emerge; the most common of these is encomiastic. Burridge also identifies a clear desire to exemplify, an intention closely related to encomium, as well as to inform. In addition, entertainment also played a role in classical biography and it is here where more sensational aspects of the genre emerge. Another informative purpose arises in preserving the memory of the subject, particularly of deceased subjects, as well as the didactic aim of preserving the subject's teachings and his life as a practical demonstration of these. Finally, from the very beginning of the classical biography, the genre 'found its home in

¹⁴⁶ The ability to read in early-modern Germany was far from universal and it took time for confessional educational programmes to take effect before the relationship between Protestantism and literacy developed. Furthermore, the cost of reading was still largely prohibitive. See R. A. Houston, *Literacy in Early Modern Europe: Culture and Education 1500-1800* (London: Longman, 1988), p. 148. For a discussion of the association of Protestantism and literacy, see for example, Richard Gawthrop and Gerald Strauss, 'Protestantism and Literacy in Early Modern Germany', *Past and Present*, 104 (1984), 31-55 (p. 31).

controversy'.¹⁴⁷ In mediating traditions and memories, works assumed both apologetic and polemical aims in defending their subjects and their causes. Burrige's analysis of both earlier and later βίοι shows that a variety of purposes are possible within one text, but that these largely fall into the scheme outlined above.

While encomium is shown not to be an aim of the gospel writers, there is a clear intent to provide a paradigm of discipleship and behaviour, and the texts, therefore, must be informative. In the same way, the gospels have an obvious didactic aim in demonstrating not only Christ's thought but also his enactment of it. The purpose of preserving Jesus's memory following his death is present in the gospels but in a very different way to classical biography, given the belief that Jesus had risen. Somewhat surprisingly perhaps, Burrige argues that the gospels do have apologetic and polemical aims which are linked to circumstances that occasioned their production, for example Luke has been viewed as an apologetic and might have been used for Paul at his trial.¹⁴⁸ Once again, through the analysis of authorial intention, clear similarities emerge between the gospels and classical βίοι.

Melanchthon's *Historia* clearly blends many of the authorial intentions specified by Burrige. The laudatory intention is made clear in the preface; Melanchthon sets out to praise Luther's good qualities throughout his life, so much so that the reader cannot miss the encomiastic purpose of the work. Similarly, the Luther of the *Historia* is to be seen as an example to all Christian men, 'quae ad confirmandam pietatem in bonis mentibus profutura essent' (Aiiii^r). This aim was also made clear in the preface and through the various deeds of Luther's life narrated, the reader is expected to identify his overriding characteristics of faith and steadfastness in it, which he should then seek to emulate. The connection here with classical biography is obvious in fulfilling the moral purpose of the reading of the text, as it is with the gospels and the notion that one should attempt to follow the example of Christ. Equally, Melanchthon makes clear in the preface that one of his aims is to provide accurate information in order to correct false reports on Luther's life:

¹⁴⁷ Patricia Cox Miller, *Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest for the Holy Man* (Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California P., 1983), p. 135.

¹⁴⁸ See A. J. Matill Jr, 'The Jesus-Paul Parallels and the Purpose of Luke-Acts', *Novum Testamentum*, 17 (1975), 15-46.

quae posteritatem de multis rebus commonefacere posset, deinde et calumnias refutaret eorum, qui vel incitatum a principibus viris aut aliis, ut labefactaret Episcoporum dignitatem, vel privata ispum cupiditate inflammatum, servitutis Monasticae vincula rupisse fingunt. (Aiiii^r)

Therefore, Melanchthon is concerned not only with correcting a misleading depiction of Luther but also preserving a true image of the reformer that might serve future generations. Connected with this intention is the concentration on explaining Luther's theology and the principal aspects of the Lutheran movement through a discussion of his life; furthermore, this didactic purpose to the work is reinforced by the *vita*'s function as a preface to a collection of Luther's writings. The authorial intention present from the start of the *Historia*, therefore, demonstrates a close relationship to the models present in βίοι and the gospels. As will emerge later in this analysis, however, Melanchthon employs the *Historia* to address additional humanist aims and ties them closely to the theological course of the Lutheran movement, thereby using Luther's life as a vehicle to address both a historical as well as philosophical purpose.

3. Concluding Remarks

As Burridge demonstrates in his study, there is a clear case for arguing that the similarities between classical biography and the gospels are so great as to indicate a common tradition, and that the latter inherited much from the former. By adopting Burridge's methodology, it has been possible to establish a connection between these inter-dependent narrative models to show that a genre-based analysis of classical βίοι and the gospels can serve as the basis for a study of Reformation biography.

Faced with the task of depicting the life of one of the Church's potentially greatest heretics, this analysis of the text's external features shows that Melanchthon drew on pre-existing, familiar and orthodox narrative models as a way of justifying narratively the Lutheran Church's founder. While there are variations from the classical and biblical models in Melanchthon's *Historia*, these are not so great as to deny any connection given the flexible nature of the ancient genre.

The implications of this similarity between the *Historia* and the ancient texts, especially the gospels, are clear. First, Melanchthon drew on established ways of

writing history to represent Luther's life. Secondly, these established ways were anchored in orthodox narrative models of biography, which have the effect of legitimising Luther's life and deeds. Finally, the narrative model used by Melanchthon supports his explicit understanding of his friend as a key figure in ecclesiastical history and draws on the master-narratives of Christian lives as well as classical philosophers. The writing of history, in Melanchthon's *Historia*, is thus central to his understanding of Luther the man, and thereby plays an instrumental role in the reform movement's cause as a process of historical legitimization. Melanchthon's narrative emplotment of Luther is all the more important given its lasting effect on the Protestant understanding and narrative description of the movement's founder, as well as the way in which it influenced depictions on the opposite side of the confessional divide.

Chapter Three:

Childhood



Published two years after Luther's death, Melanchthon's *Historia de vita et actis Martini Lutheri* (1548) is one of the earliest full biographies of the Reformer's life. At first glance, the *Historia* provides a seemingly uncomplicated and authoritative account that has served as the source of primary information on the details of Luther's life and shaped its representation for many generations. Surprisingly, however, the *Historia* has remained largely neglected by the scholarly community; secondary literature on the text is scarce and it has never been the focus of any in-depth analysis. By focusing on Melanchthon's short account, this study of Luther's childhood aims to present an insight into how the Reformation was recorded and narrativized by its first historians. The study has required an examination of a variety of classical, biblical and hagiographical models to recreate the sixteenth-century biographical tradition, which in turn allows Melanchthon's inheritance from older narrative structures to be identified. Through an analysis of Melanchthon's *Historia*, this study will demonstrate how this early historian of the Reformation used well-

established narrative models of infancy to incorporate the ultimate heterodox history into an orthodox version of the past, and how they thereby justified their cause.

1. Introduction

Often defined by the battle cry of *sola scriptura*,¹⁴⁹ the Lutheran Reformation may be seen as the conception of a radically different view of ecclesiastical history.¹⁵⁰

Charged with heresy, early Lutherans justified their cause through an interpretation of history in which the Church had been debased through decadence since the late antique period. This argument placed early Lutherans in a difficult position; given Christ's unquestionable promise to remain with the one, true church forever in Matthew 28. 20 and John 14. 16-17, it was unthinkable for the Church to have grown into such a corrupt institution.

In order to solve this potential blasphemy, early supporters of the Reformation required a narrative solution, which they found in a two-fold argument. First, they argued that the Church had been in a state of decline for some time, and that Luther was divinely chosen to return Her to Her true state; if the Church were not in decline, Luther would not have been necessary. Secondly, they adopted a medieval, heretical construct to incorporate selected pre-Reformation heretics along with orthodox figures as witnesses to the True Church, who had existed parallel to and within the institutional Church for centuries.¹⁵¹ By casting these figures as proto-Lutherans, this theory showed that Reform theology was both ancient and orthodox, and simultaneously depicted the institutional Church as the corrupt body of Protestant propaganda. This argument thus identifies the parallel existence of the one, true Church alongside the false, corrupt body that persecuted true believers.

¹⁴⁹ As for example in J.P. Kirsch, 'The Reformation', in *The Catholic Encyclopaedia*, 17 vols (XII), ed. by Charles G. Herbermann (London: Encyclopaedia Press, 1913); available on-line at <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12700b.htm#II>> [last accessed 10/11/2013].

¹⁵⁰ Ferdinand Christian Baur, 'The Reformation and the Old Protestant View of History: The *Magdeburg Centuries*', in *Ferdinand Christian Baur on the Writing of Church History*, ed. by Peter C. Hodgson (New York: OUP, 1968), pp. 79-105 (p. 80).

¹⁵¹ Although this argument regularly occurs in sixteenth-century Protestant writing on ecclesiastical history, little if any scholarly investigation seems to have taken place on the subject. This theory reaches a more fully articulated expression in Matthias Flacius Illyricus's *Catalogus testium veritatis* (Leiden: Candinus, 1556).

Within this Protestant conception of history, Luther emerges as a divinely elected subject who has a turning-effect on the course of history; his coming and representation as a prophet are prepared by the emplotment of orthodox and heterodox figures as Protestant reformers *avant la lettre*; Hus, Savonarola, *et al*, become, like John the Baptist, figures preparing the way for the arrival of a greater being. To this end, early Reformation historians drew on well-established, familiar Catholic narrative models to cast Luther as an orthodox figure. Thus, Protestant history was not built upon the demolition of medieval history but rather upon its reinterpretation, in which the concept of the unbroken chain of witnesses, regardless of inconsistencies, was crucial evidence of God's continual presence and as rebuttal of the charge of innovation.

In the *Historia*, Melanchthon's depiction of Luther's childhood reveals obvious inheritances from older biographical writing that demonstrate the connection particularly clearly. This analysis aims, therefore, to identify the narrative models used by Melanchthon to cast Luther as an orthodox figure of church history in the depiction of Luther's childhood. In turn, this analysis will demonstrate a clear connection between Melanchthon's *Historia* and an established tradition of writing ecclesiastical history, the effect of which justifies Luther the man and his cause.

2. Childhood

Luther's childhood, along with his monastic years, has traditionally been viewed as crucial to an understanding of the development of the later reformer;¹⁵² yet its depiction lies at the heart of the problem of representing Luther's life and indicates some of the basic issues facing biography. A chronological approach to life writing requires the treatment of childhood which at the same time must indicate something of the man's future greatness. If the subject is of obscure origins, it is highly unlikely that any detailed record will exist of his infancy and puerility; this situation is made all the more problematic in the pre-bureaucratic age of sixteenth-century Germany.¹⁵³ The biographer of Luther must compensate, however, for the lack of historical data surrounding this period of Luther's life by fashioning anecdotes that

¹⁵² See for example the treatment of childhood in Peter Manns, *Martin Luther* (Freiburg: Herder, 1982), pp. 14-19.

¹⁵³ See Raymond S. Wright III, *Ancestors in German Archives* (Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing, 2004), vol. 1, p. 7.

illustrate the character and image of the more documented Reformer Luther. This is particularly the case in Luther's years before he entered the monastery where the biographer must rely on a very scant supply of historical data and some dubious retrospective statements from Luther *inter alia* regarding his early life.

Given the flexibility of the term 'childhood' in the medieval and early-modern periods, it is here understood to refer to the years prior to Luther's matriculation at the University of Erfurt in 1501.¹⁵⁴ This extends the standard definition by several years, but, as Hunt showed, the concept of childhood was often carried through to adolescence in early-modern societies.¹⁵⁵ In modern biographical writing, chronology is granted an important status, with childhood and youth often playing decisive roles in the development of the individual's personality; however, even in the current and more documented age, the significance attached to the memory of childhood is not without its problems, both internally in the subject's own memory of events and externally in the representation of those events.¹⁵⁶

The internal question of the subject's memory of his own past challenges the historical veracity of an account; what data do exist are often unreliable: Freud argues, for example, that autobiographical memories are often later constructs that the individual tailors to his own self-image.¹⁵⁷ Moreover, what is recalled is not always the historically most relevant or important, as an event has a greater chance of being remembered if it was important to the individual at the point in time it occurred rather than at a late stage in his development. In the depiction of their own

¹⁵⁴ Luther matriculated at the University of Erfurt in the Easter term 1501; he was approximately eighteen years old but as will later be shown, his age cannot be given with any certainty; for details of Luther's matriculation, however, see Johann C. H. Weissenborn, *Acten der Universität Erfurt (1392-1636)*, 3 vols, *Geschichtsquellen der Provinz Sachsen*, 8 (1-3) (Halle: Otto Hendel, 1881-1884), II, p. 219.

¹⁵⁵ David Hunt, *Parents and Children in History: The Psychology of Family Life in Early-Modern France* (New York; London: Basic Books, 1970), p. 35.

¹⁵⁶ Unsurprisingly, the literature surrounding the question of adult recall of childhood memories is vast; psychology acknowledges that what was considered significant in the child's life at the time of its occurrence may not be so in terms of the subsequent adult's life, and that the process of remembering can be influenced or recreated by external fictions later in life. For an overview of this area, see Martin A. Conway, 'Past and Present: Recovered Memories and False Memories', in Martin A. Conway, ed., *Recovered Memories and False Memories* (Oxford: OUP, 1997), pp. 150-191.

¹⁵⁷ For Freud's thinking on the construction of memory, see 'Screen Memories' (1899), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. by James Strachey, 24 vols (London: Hogarth, 1953-74), vol. 3, pp. 299-322 (p. 322), and 'Constructions in Analysis' (1937), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 23, pp. 255-270 (pp. 258-259 and p. 260).

past, children, in particular, are more likely to draw on generic, iterative memories rather than solid, singulative and auto-specific memory, as preferred by historians.¹⁵⁸

Just as the subject's internal recollection of events is historically questionable, so too is the biographer's external representation of them. Biographers often back-project common *mythoi* on to a subject's childhood to compensate for the absence of historical data; yet by drawing on standard narrative units, they replace the individual historical truth with generic tropes. The effect of this creates narrative tension between a fundamentally iterative depiction of childhood and an interpretation that argues for a singulatively influential period in the subject's life; Erikson, for example, endows Luther's relationship with his parents with a critical significance to his later understanding of sin despite the clichéd nature of the anecdotes that surround Luther's childhood, and Luther's own claims to have enjoyed a positive family life during this period.¹⁵⁹ It is in the depiction of childhood that the biographer must be at his most creative, given that historical data for this period are often scarce, particularly if the subject rose to fame only later in life. In this respect, the representation of Luther epitomizes the problem of biographical writing on childhood, drawing significantly on personal and third-person memory of dubious authority as well as common *mythoi* of biographical writing.

Within classical and medieval biography, the origins and childhood of the subject are considered important to reach a full understanding of the individual; classical theory of character teaches that the individual's personality is static but developmentally revealed over time and through experience as well as partly inherited. In the classical understanding, personality was static from birth through a combination of inherited and destined character traits; at the same time, childhood was seen as a distinct period in the life of the individual and one in which development was important for revealing aspects of the individual's character. This view was largely maintained into the sixteenth century, and a sense of careful guiding is found in a variety of medieval and Renaissance texts which provide examples of rites of passage into the adult world.¹⁶⁰ In pre-sixteenth-century

¹⁵⁸ Discussed in Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, *Autobiographie* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2000), p. 33.

¹⁵⁹ Erik H. Erikson, *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (London: Faber & Faber, 1972), pp. 58-67.

¹⁶⁰ See the mediaeval 'Bildungsromane' for instances of this narrative tradition in, for example, the Ruodlieb romance, in Walter Haug, ed., *Ruodlieb: Faksimile-Ausgabe des Codex Latinus Monacensis*

narrative models, a ‘good start in life’ had both material and psychological referents that included ‘genetic’ inheritance.¹⁶¹ Rather than viewing the child simply as a miniature adult, the early-modern age came to see the child as being in a crucial stage of the individual’s development with distinct behaviour that could be fashioned and encouraged, although medieval canon law regarded pre-pubescent children incapable of committing true sin until they had become adults.¹⁶² This is also seen, for example, in the growth of schools in the late middle ages, as well as in the practice of corporal punishment which was viewed not only as a means of discipline but also as a way of inculcating certain virtues.¹⁶³ Melanchthon himself professed the view that children inherit parental characteristics:

It is true that temperaments are governed and made various by the position of the stars....Temperaments acquire something from breeding and locality ... Take the case of children, who inherit physical characteristics from their parents and therefore look somewhat like them; and yet some have strong, healthy bodies and are full of life, while others are listless and unlikely to live long.¹⁶⁴

It is not surprising, therefore, that biographers from the very beginning have not neglected Luther’s childhood and regardless of ‘historical truth’ have sought to depict the child Luther as a preparation for the later reformer, however much this representation has required a more creative and fictional approach to their subject.

As one of the master-texts of the *Lutherbild*, Melanchthon’s *Historia* is no exception to the trend of depicting Luther’s early years, and has indeed influenced subsequent representations to the present day both in terms of historical data as well

19486 der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek München und der Fragmente von St. Florian (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert, 1974).

¹⁶¹ See, for example, the depiction of lineage and childhood in Tacitus, *Agricola*, trans. by H. Mattingly and S. A. Handford (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), pp. 53-54. Equally, Suetonius highlights the importance of lineage in a number of his lives, notably those of Augustus and Titus, in *The Twelve Lives of Caesar*, trans. by Robert Graves (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1989), pp. 54-56 and pp. 292-293.

¹⁶² James A. Schultz, *The Knowledge of Childhood in the German Middle Ages: 1100-1350*, Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania P., 1995), p. 52.

¹⁶³ Hunt, p. 134.

¹⁶⁴ Philip Melanchthon, *Initia doctrinae physicae* (Wittenberg: Johannes Lufft, 1549), quoted in Peter Maxwell-Stuart, ed., *The Occult in Early-Modern Europe: A Documentary History* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 93-94; the text is available in *CR*, 13, 17-412.

as the legends surrounding these years.¹⁶⁵ The importance attached by Melanchthon to Luther's childhood and adolescence is indicated by the seemingly large amount of text accorded them. Drawing on a mixture of classical, hagiographical and humanistic narrative models, Melanchthon's short depiction of the childhood of his friend, despite its iterative nature, suggests a highly influential period in Luther's life that shaped his adulthood, and ultimately the course of the Reformation. Melanchthon casts the period of Luther's education as one of darkness, a standard humanist image since the age of Petrarch,¹⁶⁶ against which backdrop Luther's talents are those of the humanist biography: rapid progress as a youth, independent critique of scholastic dialectic, initiative in reading pagan classics, and the talent of distinguishing between *verbum* and *res* (Avi^r).¹⁶⁷ Importantly, Melanchthon adopts the common Renaissance practice of using his biography as a vehicle to promote his own philosophical, humanist cause;¹⁶⁸ Melanchthon's text suggests that had Luther's childhood been more heavily influenced by humanist education, then his extreme character and temper might have been moderated, which in turn might have altered the entire course of the Reformation.

3. Analysis

Introduction

As a reading of classical and biblical writings shows, the title of a text may provide a 'master word' that indicates genre and guides later interpretation.¹⁶⁹ The title of Melanchthon's *Historia* follows this established practice: 'Historia de vita et actis reverendiss. viri D.Mart. Lutheri, verae Theologiae Doctoris, bona fide conscripta, a Philippo Melanthe' (Aiiii^r). The use of 'historia' as the first word of

¹⁶⁵ A simple reading of biographies of Luther indicates, for example, the widespread 'certainty' of Luther's date of birth, gained from Melanchthon's writings; the actual date of Luther's birth is unknown and the date accepted by most historians is one which tallied with Melanchthon's astrological interpretation of Luther's nativity. See for example, the description of Luther's birth in Richard Marius, *Martin Luther: The Christian between God and Death* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. P., 1999), p. 1.

¹⁶⁶ James Michael Weiss, 'Erasmus at Luther's Funeral: Melanchthon's Commemorations of Luther in 1546', *Sixteenth-Century Journal*, 16.1 (1985), 91-114 (p. 99).

¹⁶⁷ Discussed in Weiss, 'Erasmus', p. 100.

¹⁶⁸ Discussed in James Michael Weiss, 'The Six Lives of Rudolph Agricola: Forms and Functions of the Humanist Biography', *Humanistica Lovaniensia: Journal of Neo-Latin Studies*, 30 (1981), 19-40 (p. 37).

¹⁶⁹ Richard Burridge, *What are the Gospels?*, p. 112.

Melanchthon's title recalls the classical genre of βίοί,¹⁷⁰ and enables the reader to expect a life of Luther, which is supported by the use of 'vita' and the subject's name in the genitive case.¹⁷¹ Importantly, however, the addition of 'vita' and 'actis' indicates that Melanchthon's method will demonstrate his subject's character and his purpose on earth through a concentration on Luther's life and deeds, following the implicit characterological representations typical of classical biography and the gospels in which personality is demonstrated by acts rather than direct authorial commentary. Luther's own title suggests his status and authority as a doctor of 'true' theology, and the veracity of the account is stressed in the closing words. Therefore, the overall function of the title is to indicate that the reader will be provided with a historical narrative describing the life and acts of Luther in which his deeds will demonstrate his character.

In Policarius's edition of Melanchthon's *Historia*, the title is followed by thirteen distichs summarising Luther's life from university until death. Thereafter, Melanchthon's preface, itself a standard narrative unit of βίοί, stresses his authority and the veracity of his account, while introducing the nature of his subject's characterisation; once again, this recalls the practice common to ancient historiography in which the preface was used to explain the purpose of the work as well as to provide some background to the text.¹⁷² The dominance of Luther in the preface reinforces his status as the subject of the work. From the opening sentence, Luther appears as God's agent on earth, 'de beneficiis quae Deus per Lutherum orbi terrarum contulit' (A¹), and this characterisation is followed throughout the *Historia*.

Developing the portrayal of Luther in the funeral oration,¹⁷³ the *Historia*'s preface opens following the practice of classical biography, reiterated by Renaissance humanists, in stressing Luther's importance as an imitable example. This use of Luther as a moral example again defines the work as biography and draws on the narrative traditions of βίοί and the gospels, in which the subject generates interest not just in himself as a historical figure but also in providing moral

¹⁷⁰ As Burridge indicates, the term 'biography' is both anachronistic and misleading when examining classical and biblical models; therefore, he champions the term βίοί as both more informative and accurate for an analysis of ancient models. Burridge defines βίος as a flexible genre with 'strong relationships with history, encomium and rhetoric, moral philosophy and the concern for character' (Burridge, p. 69).

¹⁷¹ See Burridge, p. 133.

¹⁷² See for example the opening of *Agricola*: Tacitus, 'Agricola', in *The Agricola and the Germania* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1948; 1970), p. 53.

¹⁷³ See p. 12, note 8.

lessons for subsequent generations. This use of Luther as an example forms one of the *Historia*'s two apologetic purposes; the other, as Melanchthon makes clear, is to defend Luther against his enemies' charges:

Utilis autem esset et privatae ipsius vitae consideratio luculenter scripta, plena enim fuit Exemplorum, quae ad confirmandam pietatem in bonis mentibus profutura essent, et occasionum recitatio, quae posteritatem de multis rebus commonefacere posset, deinde et calumnias refutaret eorum, qui vel incitatum a principibus viris aut aliis, ut labefactaret Episcoporum dignitatem, vel privata ispum cupiditate inflammatum, servitutis Monasticae vincula rupisse fingunt. (Aiiii^r)

The preface continues by maintaining that while Luther never wrote such an autobiography, had he done so, it would have been done faithfully, 'tamen et in ipso tantum gravitatis fuisse scimus, ut optima fide Historiam recitaturus fuerit' (Aiiii^r). Here, Melanchthon sets out a master characteristic that will govern his entire representation of Luther, namely his steadfastness. Furthermore, this characterisation follows the classical and gospel models of representing personality indirectly, namely through a depiction of acts, albeit here in a hypothetical instance, in which Luther's character is confirmed via an act that never took place but had it done so, it would have testified to his steadfastness. In the absence of an autobiography, Melanchthon stresses his authority as an 'eyewitness' as well as the testimony of others who would challenge any unfaithful representation:

Sed quia editionem talis historiae fatalis ipsius dies antevertit, nos iisdem de rebus ea, quae partim ex ipso audivimus, partim ipse vidimus, bona fide recitaturi sumus. (Av^v)

The importance of things heard and seen, 'audivimus' and 'vidimus', recalls the gospels' claim of authenticity in Luke 1. 3-4, John 1. 14, 19. 35, and 21. 34, and reinforces the clear affinities found in the preface with the classical and gospel models. Luther's status as the subject is clear throughout and the manner of characterisation is suggestive of ancient models. It is significant that Melanchthon

invokes himself as a witness in the narrative but never as a participant despite his presence at Luther's side for nearly thirty years.

Importantly, the image of Luther that subsequently emerges in Melanchthon's portrayal does not reveal the harsh side of Luther's character, but merely acknowledges that Luther lacked that virtue most praised by classical life-writing, moderation in character and temper. Instead, Melanchthon uses such character flaws in Luther's development to show his accomplishments as a result of humanistic influence and even suggests that had such influence been greater, Luther might have been more successful. As has been suggested by Weiss, it is here that Melanchthon's organisational principle is to be found in the representation of Luther's childhood and one fitting the *præceptor Germaniæ*: the championing of humanistic learning.¹⁷⁴ In short, Melanchthon argues that where Luther failed, he did so not of his own fault, but because of a lack of thorough humanist training. To this end, the account of Luther's awakening to education is 'full of terms conventional to Renaissance humanists',¹⁷⁵ so much so that the reader is left in no doubt that Luther's childhood and education enabled him to carry out his future reformation of the Church.

Introduction to family

The depiction of Luther begins before his arrival in the narrative. Following the preamble, the *Historia* opens with a canonical biographical topos, familiar from classical biography, hagiography and biblical models, namely the ancestry and virtues of his parents:

Vetus familia est, et late propagata mediocrium hominum, cognomine Luther, in ditone inclytorum Comitum Manssfeldensium. Parentes vero Martini Lutheri primum in oppido Issleben, ubi Martinus Lutherus natus est, domicilium habuerunt, deinde migrarunt in oppidum Manssfeldt, ubi pater Iohannes Lutherus et Magistratus gessit, et propter integritatem omnibus bonis viris carissimus fuit. (Av^v)

¹⁷⁴ Weiss, 'Erasmus', p. 92.

¹⁷⁵ Weiss, 'Erasmus', p. 91.

The rhetoric of legitimation prevails throughout this passage with the Luthers epitomising virtue either in their own characters or even as representatives of the renowned counts of Mansfeld. The repeated references to the counts of Mansfeld may in part be an act of flattery by Melanchthon, as the counts still supported the Lutheran Church in 1546, as well as a preparation for the second aim of the *Historia*, the defence of Luther against the charge of innovation and of having overstepped the bounds into political statements. These charges were particularly topical in 1546 as the emperor was preparing for war against the princes of Hesse and Saxony, who had often sought Luther's counsel.¹⁷⁶ Simultaneously, their status as subjects almost grants the Luthers the same respectability.

The subsequent depiction of the Luther family draws on well-established hagiographical narrative models, and serves not only to stress Luther's status as a German figure, whose family had been long settled in the area, but also provides a prophetic quality to Luther's own depiction.¹⁷⁷ This depiction occurs in the introduction to Hans Luther, where his qualities as a magistrate are stressed. Hans is known for his integrity and is cherished by all good men, 'propter integritatem omnibus bonis viris carissimus fuit' (Av^v); these characteristics are further confirmed in his capacity as a magistrate. The notion that children inherited the characteristics of the parents had long been prevalent, with medieval literature as well as biblical precedents at least establishing the importance of the individual's genealogy.¹⁷⁸ Therefore, by stressing such positive characteristics in Hans Luther, Melanchthon argues for their presence in Martin by drawing implicitly on a popular understanding of personality.

The proleptic description of Hans Luther is complemented by the representation of Luther's mother, Margarethe. Melanchthon draws on a classic *topos* of the biography of the saint found in hagiography as well as medieval literature to cast Margarethe as modest, God-fearing, and pious, and importantly a model to others:

¹⁷⁶ See Karl Brandi, *The Emperor Charles V: The Growth and Destiny of a Man and a World Empire* (London: J. Cape, 1939), pp. 543-549.

¹⁷⁷ See, for example, the depiction of the parental qualities of St Nicholas, St Thomas Becket, and St James the Greater, in Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda aurea*, (Dresden; Leipzig: Arnold, 1846).

¹⁷⁸ See Schultz, 'The Nature of the Noble Lineage', in *The Knowledge of Childhood in the German Middle Ages*, pp. 54-61.

In matre Margarita, coniuge Iohannis Lutheri, cum coeterae erant virtutes honestae Matronae convenientes, tum vero praecipue lucebant pudicitia, timor Dei, et invocatio, intuebanturque in eam coeterae honestae mulieres, ut in exemplar virtutum. (Av^{v-r})

In medieval religious biography, the saint's mother is almost always cast as pious and serves as a prophetic indicator of the son as well as recalling the gospel paradigm of sanctity in Mary.¹⁷⁹ As with the depiction of the father, the hagiographical tradition suggests that these characteristics will be transferred to the child, and the reader sees in the description of the mother a prophetic reference to the child and the later Luther. In this way, Luther's family, and ultimately Luther himself, is represented in generic terms drawn from established biographical forms, rather than singulative, historical fact. Interestingly, Melanchthon does not furnish any other information on Margarethe or Hans; indeed, Melanchthon reduces the social standing of both parents to a relatively neutral status, 'mediocrium hominum' (Av^v). This description enables Melanchthon to cast the Luthers as unaffected by class; he does, of course, acknowledge that they are of humble background but does not investigate Luther's father's occupation and rank further, neatly appointing him a *magistratus*. This avoidance of denoting social status is a result of Luther's lowly background but shows Melanchthon attempting to work within the tropes of the genre, which normally deal with the high-born, while dealing with inconvenient facts. Simultaneously, this simple statement shows the intrusion of the sixteenth century through its choice of hero with a classical model which requires the trope of origins to be included even if others could be ignored. The absence of any reference to Luther's class is also striking given both the contemporary importance attached to it,¹⁸⁰ alongside subsequent emphasis on its significance to Luther's development.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ See for example the description of the mother in Guibert de Nogent, *Autobiographie*, ed. and trans. by Edmond-René Labande, Les Classiques de l'histoire de France au Moyen Age, 34 (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1981), p. 10. In the first instance, Mary's piety is suggested through her own kinship to Elizabeth as well as direct description, for example, in Luke 1; for a discussion of this, see Richard Bauckham, 'Elizabeth and Mary in Luke 1: Reading a Gynocentric Text Intertextually', in *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2002), pp. 47-76.

¹⁸⁰ On the complexity and problems of defining social rank in early-modern Germany, see Thomas A. Brady Jr, 'Estates and Classes: Historical Sociology and the Age of the Reformation', in Thomas A. Brady Jr, *Ruling Class, Regime and Reformation at Strasburg 1520-1555* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), pp. 19-33.

¹⁸¹ Among historians of the Reformation, the following provide distinctly Marxist interpretations of Luther's rise and the influence of his own background on the nature of the Reformation's

While Melanchthon presents Hans Luther as a member of the burgher class without acknowledging him as an *arriviste*, research into the background of Margarethe has shown her to be from a wealthy, educated family and she was the more literate of Luther's parents.¹⁸² It is, therefore, significant that Melanchthon only comments on Margarethe's modesty and piety, characteristics which function as proleptors of the later Luther. Moreover, the effect of his depiction stresses Luther's independence by ignoring the help he received at the hands of his well-established maternal family,¹⁸³ thereby depicting his subsequent rise as entirely a consequence of his own efforts and merits.

By depicting Luther's parents with sympathetic and narratively useful characteristics, Melanchthon prepares the representation of Luther and follows classical models. In this way, Melanchthon simultaneously asserts the dominance of familial traits as proof of his statements regarding Luther as well as tacitly suggesting the outward signs of a saint by adopting stock hagiographical *topoi* to describe a saint's parents. Such *topoi* do not necessarily suggest divine guidance but provide support to the portents of future greatness in the predictions by Mellerstadt, cited later in the *Historia*.¹⁸⁴ By adopting elements of the medieval tradition of life writing, the historical veracity of the account is rendered questionable, but simultaneously the standard narrative forms and tropes help to define the genre of the *Historia* and endow Luther with the genealogy of a medieval saint. In turn, the effect of Melanchthon's narrative canonisation will grant Luther divine authority and exculpate him from the charges of heresy that Melanchthon will introduce later in the *Historia*.

development: Gerhard Zschäbitz, *Martin Luther: Grösse und Grenze (1483-1526)* (Berlin [East]: Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1967); and Leo Stern, Max Steinmetz, Erhard Voigt, and Gerhard Brendler, *450 Jahre Reformation* (Berlin [East]: Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1967).

¹⁸² See the discussion of Margarethe Luther in Ian D. K. Siggins, 'Luther's Mother Margarethe', *Harvard Theological Review*, 71 (1978), 125-50 (p. 143).

¹⁸³ This understanding of Luther's struggle through education has shaped social and 'parental' views of him in biographies up to the twentieth century; see for example the depiction of Luther's childhood in Richard Marius, *Martin Luther: The Christian between God and Death* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. P., 1999), pp. 19-42.

¹⁸⁴ Hic inter quotidiana exercitia Scholae et concionum, magis etiam lucere eius ingenium coepit. Cumque eum attente audirent viri sapientes, Doctor Martinus Mellerstadius et alii, saepe dixit Mellerstadius, tantam esse vim ingenii in hoc viro, ut plane praesagiret mutaturum esse vulgare doctrinae genus, quod tunc in Scholis unicum tradebatur (Avii^V).

Birthdate

The representation of Luther in the *Historia* begins immediately after Melanchthon has detailed Luther's parents and the lineage of his character; Melanchthon does this by introducing himself into the narrative, thereby demonstrating his authority as a familiar of Luther and his family, and by raising the question of Luther's nativity:

Haec mihi aliquoties interroganti de tempore, quo Filius natus est, respondit, diem et horam se certo meminisse, sed de anno dubitare. Affirmabat autem natum esse die decimo Novembris, nocte post horam undecimam, ac nomen Martini attributum infanti, quod dies proximus, quo infans per Baptismum Ecclesiae Dei insertus est, Martino dicatus fuisset. Sed frater eius Iacobus, vir honestus et integer, opinionem familiae de aetate fratris hanc fuisse dicebat, natum esse Anno a natali Christi 1483. (Av^r)

This account of Luther's birth is succinct and without narrative embellishment; these two stylistic aspects carry with them a suggestion of indisputable fact, and endow Melanchthon's narrative with authority. Unsurprisingly, neither Luther nor his mother knew exactly when he had been born, and much discussion has subsequently taken place by both Catholics and Lutherans in order to find the most auspicious moment for Luther's birth.¹⁸⁵ This debate has questioned not only the year, but also the date and the time; all factors, which according to late-medieval astrology, would determine not only the nature of the child but various world events as well. Having cast himself as an authority on Luther's life through his personal connections, Melanchthon uses the *Historia* to support his own theory regarding Luther's nativity, that of 11.20 p.m. on 10 November 1483. This specific citation of 1483 conceals a much larger debate, initiated and chaired by Melanchthon, and denies the alternative dates that he had previously proffered, connecting with Melanchthon's interests in

¹⁸⁵ See the debate surrounding the various years in Reinhart Staats, 'Noch einmal: Luthers Geburtsjahr: 1484', in Jürgen H. Hoppmann, ed., *Melanchthons Astrologie: Der Weg der Sternwissenschaft zur Zeit von Humanismus und Reformation*, Katalog zur Ausstellung vom 15. September bis 15. Dezember 1997 im Reformationsgeschichtlichen Museum Lutherhalle Wittenberg (Wittenberg: Drei Kastanien, 1997), pp. 51-54.

astrology and its relevance to the world.¹⁸⁶ Beneath this seemingly incontrovertible description lies a complicated and involving story, and it is one which reveals much of both Melanchthon's own thinking as well as the importance of rectifying the historical narrative to reflect the overall interpretative principle of the text.¹⁸⁷

For the most part, the sixteenth century did not keep records of everyday life and, in fact, it was not until the Reformation that baptismal records started to be kept on a large scale.¹⁸⁸ Although more notice was taken of the children of the nobility, and their birthdates acknowledged in a range of records, the pre-bureaucratic age's ignorance of the birth of children of insignificant or obscure origins was the norm. While Luther's family did not belong wholly to the peasantry and was rising in status, Luther's birth went officially unnoticed. As such, it is unsurprising that no contemporary records of Luther's birth were made, and indeed shrouded with uncertainty, the *topos* of Luther's birth provides him with an enigmatic air, and recalls models found in βίοι and hagiography.¹⁸⁹ Narrative conventions from classical life-writing required the birth to be given some treatment, however, and Luther's first biographers had no other source than those who had known the Luthers at this time and before anyone would have thought of the need to narrativise his biography.

While normal by contemporary standards, for Melanchthon, however, this uncertainty surrounding Luther's birth was clearly unacceptable and he rectifies the details to provide an altogether more assured and definite date; as such, the *Historia* records Luther's date of birth with certainty and precision as the 10 November 1483 after 11 p.m., 'die decimo Novembris, nocte post horam undecimam'. In virtually all subsequent accounts of Luther's life from both sides of the confessional divide and including serious scholarly texts, Luther's birth is given as occurring in 1483, and many adopt the additional details of the day and time. Many of these accounts provide the details and cite Margarethe Luther, often quoting verbatim

¹⁸⁶ See the discussion of Melanchthon's interest in astrology, in Jürgen H. Hoppmann, *Melanchthons Astrologie*, and Jürgen G. H. Hoppmann, *Astrologie der Reformationszeit* (Berlin: Clemens Zerkow, 1998).

¹⁸⁷ I am grateful to Peter Macardle for his helpful suggestions on the question of dating Luther's birth and for sharing references and an unpublished article on Luther's nativity, 'In My Beginning is My End', which serve as the basis for the analysis given in pp. 87-90.

¹⁸⁸ See Kenneth L. Smith, *German Church Books: Beyond the Basics* (Picton Press: Camden Maine, 1993).

¹⁸⁹ A reading of the *Legenda aurea*, for example, reveals that the births of most saints are not recorded with any detail; see Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda aurea*, (Dresden; Leipzig: Arnold, 1846).

Melanchthon's words;¹⁹⁰ while some modern accounts do acknowledge doubt surrounding the specific details,¹⁹¹ in the absence of evidence to the contrary, they conclude that the 1483 may be accepted, and thereby seal the date with their approval and offer it as verified fact.¹⁹²

Yet this certainty and precision are entirely of Melanchthon's creation; the date is not based on any known historical primary source and, indeed, reflects Melanchthon's philosophical and astrological interests. Melanchthon had previously offered alternative dates and times for Luther's birth, including references to different years, and despite the spurious nature of Melanchthon's identification of Luther's date of birth, all subsequent accounts providing Luther's date of birth may be traced back to this master narrative. The reason why Melanchthon finally decides on the day he provides in the *Historia* is best explained through an examination of the alternative dates and the thinking that led to 10 November 1483.

Margarethe Luther claimed to remember the date of Luther's birth as the 10 November as the eve of the feast of Saint Martin of Tours, but she could not remember the year; this ignorance of the year must have been a fairly common occurrence among the fifteenth-century population whose lives were not ruled by precise dates. While Melanchthon offers Luther's brother Jakob as a witness to this date, the fact that Luther had often cited alternative dates at different times suggests an imprecise family tradition.¹⁹³ On 3 November 1534, Luther spoke of himself as being 54, suggesting he was born in 1480 or possibly 1479;¹⁹⁴ in 1540, Luther again claimed with absolute certainty that his year of birth was 1484,¹⁹⁵ but in 1542 he described himself as 60 but allowed for a year in the womb, implying that he was born in 1482 if he was being precise about months, or 1483 if he was counting

¹⁹⁰ Albrecht Beutel, *Martin Luther* (Munich: Beck, 1991), p. 21.

¹⁹¹ Andrea van Dülmen, *Luther-Chronik: Daten zu Leben und Werk* (Munich: DTV, 1987), p. 7, and Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther – Man between God and the Devil* (Yale: Yale Univ. P, 1986), p. 83.

¹⁹² Despite his questioning of the 'fact', Oberman feels 'we may safely assume the date of 1483', in Oberman, *Luther*, p. 83. Having considered 1484, Julius Köstlin opted for 1483 uncritically in 1902, in his contribution to the *Realencyklopädie*, in 'Martin Luther', in *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, ed. by Albert Hauck, 24 vols (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1896-1913), XI, pp. 720-756 (p. 723).

¹⁹³ See Georg Oergel, *Vom jungen Luther: Beiträge zur Lutherforschung* (Erfurt: Cramer, 1899), pp. 1-26, and Karl Meissinger, *Der katholische Luther*, ed. by Otto Hiltbrunner (Munich: Lehnen, 1952), p. 14.

¹⁹⁴ Luther, *Enarratio in Psalmum XC*, WA, 40/iii, p. 524, ll. 10-11.

¹⁹⁵ With no hint at irony, Luther's claim reads '1484 natus sum Mansfeldiae; certum est', in *WATr*, V, p. 76, no. 5347.

approximately in calendar years.¹⁹⁶ In April 1542, Luther again asserts that he is 60, providing a year of birth of 1481 or 1482,¹⁹⁷ while evidence in his table-talk suggests he was born in 1414 although a later hand corrects this to 1484.¹⁹⁸ Further documents of the period testify to 1484 as his year of birth and, significantly,¹⁹⁹ Luther once indicated that a pope died in the same year, and while he identifies this pope as Julius, it must have been Sixtus IV who died on 12 August 1484, an event which would have been recalled by Luther's pious parents. Staats draws attention to the Wittenberg University *Dekanatsbuch* of 1558 which records Luther's birth year as 1484, but this is later subjected to Melanchthon's authority and rectified to 1483.²⁰⁰ The evening of 10 November 1484 is given additional support in a Luther manuscript which provides a short curriculum vitae in which Luther not only provides the date but also a time around midnight.²⁰¹

A debate between Luther and Melanchthon in 1542 reveals the heart of the problem and perhaps the origins of Luther's offering of various dates; for Melanchthon, Luther's date and year of birth were inextricably linked to astrological considerations. The 1542 discussion between the two friends saw them adopt positions with a difference of two years;²⁰² when questioned by another in a conversation regarding horoscopes in 1543, Luther again acknowledged that he and Melanchthon disagreed by one year. While Luther's disapproval of astrology may be the cause of this disagreement, Melanchthon's belief in the importance of astrology was both well-established and normal within the context of the sixteenth-century; Germany's leading scholars were actively interested, and the University of Wittenberg had become a major centre for the teaching of the subject.²⁰³

In the context of the sixteenth century, anyone's date of birth could be influenced by astrological considerations, and Luther's birthday had long been the

¹⁹⁶ This offering occurs in his Lectures on Genesis, WA, 43, p. 481, ll. 2-5.

¹⁹⁷ WATr, V, pp. 138-139, no. 5428.

¹⁹⁸ WATr, II, p. 376, no. 2250

¹⁹⁹ WATr, V, p. 76, no. 5347.

²⁰⁰ Reinhart Staats, 'Noch einmal: Luthers Geburtsjahr 1484', in J. Hoppmann, ed., *Melanchthons Astrologie* (Wittenberg: Drei Kastanien, 1997), pp. 51-53 (p. 51).

²⁰¹ Bretten, Melanchthonhas, Handschrift Inv.-Nr 186: Luther, Martin, Autobiographische Daten bis 1525, Abschrift [l. 52, Nr 65].

²⁰² WATr, V, pp. 138-139, no. 5248.

²⁰³ For further information on the widespread and scholarly acceptance of astrology, see Günther Zimmermann, 'Die Publikation von "De revolutionibus orbium coelestium"', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, 96 (1985), 320-343 (pp. 324-325), and Rüdiger Plantiko, 'Melanchthon: der Lehrer und Reformator', in <<http://astrologix.de/artikel/melanch1.htm>> [last accessed 17 November 2013].

focus of conversations between Melanchthon, Johannes Carion and Johannes Pfeil.²⁰⁴ This group originally calculated 22 October 1484 as Luther's date of birth, and this suggestion quickly gained popularity and subsequently appeared in three nativities for Luther.²⁰⁵ The preference for 1484 indicates a relationship with one of the most popular works of the early sixteenth century, Johannes Lichtenberger's *Pronosticatio*,²⁰⁶ in which Lichtenberger offers numerous predictions on the Church, the Turks, the Empire, and the Jews, but lacking in consistency, the prophecy was open to much interpretation and dispute between later Catholic and Luther parties.²⁰⁷ Statements regarding Frederick the Wise indicate that Luther was aware of Lichtenberger's forecasts, and the equation of Luther with a monk who would bring unrest to the world was recognised by contemporaries, who saw in Luther's theology and the Peasants' War the calamities of which Lichtenberger's prophecies spoke.²⁰⁸ The general negativity of these horoscopes, however, possibly

²⁰⁴ In 1531, Melanchthon wrote to Erasmus Ebner and Johannes Schöner and described in both letters the work being undertaken to establish Luther's horoscope. In both letters, Melanchthon confirms that they have agreed the year and the day, but were uncertain as to the hour. By the time he wrote to Schöner, the hour had been changed by Carion to 9 p.m.; irrespective of time, the horoscope strongly suggested that Luther would be a formidable man. See Melanchthon, *Melanchthons Briefwechsel*, 1112 Reg. 2, p. 16; see also T5, pp. 30-31 (p. 31, ll. 29-36), and 1113 Reg. 2, p. 16; T5, pp. 31-32.

²⁰⁵ See Erasmus Reinhold, Stadtbibliothek Leipzig, Cod. DCCCCXXV, fol. 158^r, reproduced in Hoppmann, 'The Lichtenberger Prophecy', fig. 2; Hieronymus Cardanus, *Hieronymi Cardani libelli duo, Geniturae LXVIII* (Nuremberg: J. Petreius, 1543), and Lucas Gauricus, *Tractatus astrologicus* (Venice: T. Navo, 1552).

²⁰⁶ Johannes Lichtenberger, *Pronosticatio in Latino rara et prius non audita [...]* (Heidelberg: Heinrich Knoblochtzter, 1488). See esp. Dietrich Kurze, 'Prophecy and History. Lichtenberger's Forecasts of Events to Come (from the Fifteenth to the Twentieth Century); their Reception and Diffusion', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XXI (1958), 63-85.

²⁰⁷ In his *Prognosticatio in Latino* (Heidelberg: Heinrich Knoblochtzter, 1488), Lichtenberger had included a prophecy which dated back to Hus's execution in 1415 that a new reformer, perhaps a Messiah, would be born a hundred years later; this prophecy became a commonplace of fifteenth-century prognostication, which Luther himself acknowledged in his claim to be the swan following the roasting of the goose, a pun on Hus. For a brief examination of this question, see Jürgen G. H. Hoppmann, 'The Lichtenberger Prophecy and Melanchthon's Horoscope for Luther', *Culture and Cosmos*, 1.2 (1997), pp. 49-59. See also Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon P., 1969), pp. 347-351.

²⁰⁸ Lichtenberger's prophecy reads: Da stehet ein Munch ynn einer weissen kappen/ vnd der Teuffel sitzt yhm auff sein achseln/ hat ein langen zepplier bis auff die erden/ mit weitten ermeln/ vnd hat ein iungen München bey yhm stehend. Djs sind vnd werden die zeichen sein/ da bey man yhn wird erkennen/ Er wird schwartze fleckichen haben am leibe/ vnd wird einen heslichen leib haben von braunfleckichten manchferbichten mackeln ynn der rechten seyten/ bey dem schos vnd an der huffe/ Er stehet am teyl des glücks/ zur rechten hand des hymels/ vnd ym zehenden vom Horoscopo/ doch/ das der ascendent der beider deute weibischer sey/ vnd werden sich auff das hinderste teil des leibes am meisten neygen. Er wird auch noch ein ander zeichen an der brust haben/ aus dem teil des zeichens/ wilchs ym sechsten grad des Lewens erfunden ist. Dieser Prophet (wie das selbige Firmicus bezeuget) wird erschrecklich sein den Götten vnd den Teuffeln/ er wird vil zeichen vnd wunderwerck thun/ Seine zukunfft werden auch die bösen geiste fliehen/ vnd [Piv] die menschen/ so mit dem Teuffel besessen sind/ wird er nicht aus krafft der wörter/ sondern allein das er sich sehen lesst

prompted Melanchthon to amend his year to 1483 so as to improve the prognostication, and explains the reason why the Wittenberg astrologers subsequently attempted to disassociate Luther with a birthdate that could be read in Lichtenberger's forecast.

This desire to free Luther from any connection with Lichtenberger's forecasts does not reveal, however, when Melanchthon's thinking changed; letters from the late 1530s indicate that Melanchthon still regarded 1484 as the correct year, but the 'experts' had agreed both the day and the hour.²⁰⁹ In table-talk of 11 April 1542, Melanchthon contested Luther's own dating of the year by citing Margarethe Luther as an authority in defence of 1484, although the dates both men provide are shrouded in ambiguity. The use of Luther's mother as the ultimate authority, however, suggests an act of rectification on Melanchthon's part as he had previously acknowledged Margarethe's uncertainty regarding the date and arguably reveals his preference for the more 'scientific' evidence provided by astrology over the mother's questionable memory.²¹⁰ Melanchthon's growing dissatisfaction with 1484 as a probable year was also doubtlessly a consequence of the problematic prophecies provided by astrologers; having been in contact with Melanchthon from the 1530s,

erretten. Aber aus dem teil des reichs yn dem eilffter dieser Coniunction/ wie da sagt Anthonius de monte Vlmo/ wird er nicht allzeit thun was er andern zu thun wird radten. Denn er wird ein trefflichen verstand haben/ vnd vieler dinge kunst/ vnd eine seer grosse weisheit/ doch wird er ynn heucheley offft lügen reden/ vnd er wird ein gebrand gewissen haben/ Vnd wie ein Scorpion/ der des Martis haus ist ynn dieser Coniunction vnd finsternis wird er die giff/ so er ym schwantz hat/ offft aus giessen. Vnd er wird auch ein vrsach sein grosses blutuergiessens. Vnd die weil Mars sein anzeiger ist/ so lest sichs ansehen/ das er wolle der Chaldeer glauben bestetigen/ wie es Messahala bezeuget. Wiewol nu dieser Prophet viel zeichen vnd wunderwerck geben wird/ doch nach der heilsamen lere Christi/ sol man yhm mit nichte anhangen/ Ja er wird fur der einer angesehen werden/ von wilchen Christus verkundiget/ das sie zukunfftig sein wurden/ wie man das findet yn der heiligen schrifft von Christo vnserm seligmacher selbs angezeigt Matthei. xxiiij. da er also saget/ So denn yemand zu euch wird sagen/ Sihe/ hie ist Christus/ odder da/ so solt yhrs nicht glewben/ Denn es werden falsche Christi vnd falsche Propheten auffstehen/ vnd grosse zeichen vnd wunder thun/ das verfuret werden yn den yrthum/ wo es muglich were/ auch die auserwelten/ Sihe ich habs euch zuuor gesagt. Darumb wenn sie zu euch sagen werden/ Sihe/ er ist ynn der wusten/ so gehet nicht hynaus/ Sihe/ er ist ynn der kamer/ so gleubet nicht. Das ist vnser Herr Jhesus Christus. In Johannes Lichtenberger, *Die weissagunge Johannis Lichtenbergers deudsch [...]* (Wittenberg: H. Luft, 1527), sigg. Oiv^v–Pi^v. It has been suggested that this prophecy had in fact been taken from Paul of Middelburg who in turn had drawn it from Arabic sources. See Dietrich Kurze, 'Prophecy and History. Lichtenberger's Forecasts of Events to Come (from the Fifteenth to the Twentieth Century); their Reception and Diffusion', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XXI (1958), 63–85 (71).

²⁰⁹ Melanchthon wrote to Osiander on the 29 January 39 and stressed his conviction regarding the day and hours, and ascribed his authority to Luther's mother's own word; see *Melanchthons Briefwechsel*, 2142, Reg. 2, p. 411; CR, IV, 1052–1053, no. 1770c.

²¹⁰ This insistence on Margarethe's memory is repeated throughout all subsequent Luther biographies; see, for example, the entry on Martin Luther in the *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, 45 vols (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1884), IXX, pp. 660–692 (p. 661).

Gauricus's horoscope casts Luther in a clearly negative light,²¹¹ which was only intensified in Cardano's subsequent casting which adopted the 1483 date.²¹²

This shifting of the date between 1483 and 1484 represents a well-established practice of rectifying dates to provide a satisfactory horoscope according to the proof of the subject's later deeds; this practice was not only common but accepted throughout the academic astrological community.²¹³ Given the perfectly natural ignorance of Luther's birthdate, it seemed reasonable to assume that the science of astrology could provide a more reliable indication as to the actual date of birth than the unreliable testimony of Luther's mother; if Margarethe's testimony did not correlate with a favourable horoscope, it was perfectly simple to dismiss the evidence she had provided and correct this according to the date required by the superior, academic practice of astrology. In this light, Melanchthon's vacillation between horoscopes and their respective dates in his letters to Ebner and Schöner in 1531 is perfectly understandable. By 1539, consensus had been reached and Margarethe's evidence now tallied with the reliable science of astrology; indeed, Margarethe is now acknowledged as the authority of the revised date, despite the earlier doubt surrounding her memory. Margarethe's memory by this point had sharpened to recall the birth as happening 'exactly at midnight', rather than 'before midnight', and was to change again by 1546 into 'after 11 at night'. This is all the more significant given that Margarethe cannot have improved her memory since testifying in 1531 given that she had died in that same year;²¹⁴ as such, the only authority for the shifting of the time and date was Melanchthon.

Given the depth of the astrological research that had taken place over the previous two decades, the *Historia's* simple account is put into question despite the presence of the modest, pious mother, Margarethe Luther. Indeed, it is particularly noteworthy that Melanchthon makes no reference to his astrological research into Luther's birth and presents the 'facts' surrounding Luther's birth simply as the authoritative product of her memory, who just so happened to have informed the

²¹¹ Lucas Gauricus, *Tractatus astrologicus* (Venice: Curtius Trojanos Navo, 1552), fol. 69^v.

²¹² Hieronymus Cardanus, *Hieronymi Cardani Mediolanensis [...] opera omnia* (Lyon: Huguetan & Ravad, 1663), V, p. 465.

²¹³ The art of 'rectifying' nativities was a common and accepted practice among sixteenth-century astrologers which allowed horoscopes to be tailored to a known outcome; see Mary Quinlan-McGrath, 'The Foundation Horoscope(s) for St Peter's Basilica, Rome, 1506: Choosing a Time, Changing the Storia', *Isis*, 92.4 (2001), 716-741.

²¹⁴ van Dülmen, *Luther-Chronik*, p. 191.

Wittenberg astrological calculations. Melanchthon's insistence that the date he offers in the *Historia* is so significant that he introduces another figure into his narrative, Luther's brother Jakob, to bolster his revised date of birth for the reformer. Jakob's respectability and honesty, 'vir honestus et integer' (Av^r), develops the familial portrait of the Luthers and confirms the family pedigree to recall the description of Hans and once again to prepare the representation of Martin Luther. Significantly, this depiction defends the otherwise questionable testimony and reliability of the information offered; despite earlier clashes, principally over questions of Luther's vocation, Martin and Hans were on good terms,²¹⁵ and in this context, it is perhaps unusual that Hans Luther is absent from the narrative as a witness to his son's birth and recalls Jesus's Nativity in which Mary 'kept all these things [details of Jesus's life], and pondered them in her heart'.²¹⁶ While possibly not intentional, the biblical parallels cannot have escaped Melanchthon; in casting Margarete Luther as the figure of Mary, he naturally accords Luther Christ-like status.

Melanchthon presents the date of Luther's birth in an unembellished and matter-of-fact narrative; as has been shown, this depiction conceals a long-standing debate and stamps the Melanchthon imprimatur on an episode in the Luther narrative that had much wider implications for the contemporary understanding of Luther's life. Through the allusions to the significance of Luther's date of birth, the *Historia* supports Melanchthon's nativity for Luther and the importance of the confirmation of 1483, as well as revealing Luther's character, and implicit comparison of Luther with Christ. Moreover, the rectified date provides a prophecy of character that tallies with Melanchthon's friend of a stubborn, insistent, pig-headed and almost Epicurean individual;²¹⁷ as he will show, Melanchthon identifies these characteristics, innate in Luther's horoscope, as aspects that might have been corrected by a more thorough humanist education. The authority of this episode in the *Historia* has been so great

²¹⁵ The letter written by Luther to his father shortly before the latter's death demonstrates not only a formulaic act of comfort but also a closer and warmer relationship than many modern accounts allow; see *WA Br*, 5, 238-41. Similar expressions of regret were made by Luther in a letter to Johannes Reineck in which Luther writes of his father's kindness and gifts. See *WA Br*, 5, 351.

²¹⁶ Luke 2. 19.

²¹⁷ For a fuller description of the various horoscopes for Luther, see Hoppmann, *Astrologie der Reformationszeit*, pp. 68-70.

that the date of Luther's birth has been accepted by most biographies since and only recently has begun to be doubted.²¹⁸

Schooling

The representation of Luther's childhood is concerned with 'marvels that reveal the hero's divine nature',²¹⁹ and skips from his birth to childhood to focus on those elements of Luther's early youth that are relevant to Melanchthon's interpretative aim, namely education. This technique follows biblical prophet narratives that move swiftly from birth to childhood and manhood to identify gifts that reveal the subject's sanctity as inherent and divinely granted. This depiction draws on the classical precedent by focusing on those elements necessary to demonstrate character and not adhere strictly to chronology. Insofar as the aims of the text, this retains the focus on education and academic relevance. In the depiction of Luther's schooling and university education, Melanchthon draws on the hagiographical and humanist traditions to portray a boy born and destined for greatness; yet Luther's triumph is not just seen as a result of divine favour but, as Weiss shows, a direct consequence of the benefits of humanist education.²²⁰ As with medieval biographies of clerics and hagiographies, Melanchthon's narrative shifts directly from Luther's birth to education, the point in Luther's chronology where he first becomes of interest to the major interpretative principle of the text.²²¹ Here, Luther's childhood reveals such gifts that demonstrate his divinely-favoured status, yet his character description is one of the development of skill rather than of personality, recalling the small adult from medieval literature who progresses to different levels of engagement.²²² In essence, Luther's character is formed and is being revealed in response to education and in Melanchthon's telling as Luther experiences life.

²¹⁸ Compare the certainty of a recent Protestant biography, in Hans Jochen Genthe, *Martin Luther: Sein Leben und Denken* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), p. 11, with the fledgling doubt of an ecumenical Catholic approach in Peter Manns, *Martin Luther* (Freiburg: Herder, 1983), p. 15.

²¹⁹ Schultz, p. 175.

²²⁰ Weiss, 'Erasmus', p. 98.

²²¹ Compare Schultz's comments on biographies of clerics, pp. 168-169.

²²² See, for example, the depiction of education in Wolfram's *Parzival* in which the hero's journey toward knightly and courtly perfection also leads him toward an inner *mâze* and *staete*, which in turn helps him to become the ideal *Gralsritter*; in Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, ed. by Hermann Jantzen and Herbert Kolb (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1973).

The narrative of Luther's schooling develops the image of the *puer senex*, which is known from Pindar onwards and later common to hagiography, and connects with the account of the twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple in Luke 2. 40-47. This *topos* relies on an understanding of the child as inherently foolish so that if he is in possession of remarkable wisdom, this 'gift' is understood as a sign of God's favour. Jumping directly from his birth to his schooling, the *Historia*'s boy Luther is in possession of a precocious intelligence which is recalled through his success at learning:

Postquam aetas doctrinae capax fuit, parentes filium Martinum ad agnitionem et timorem Dei, et ad aliarum virtutum officia domestica institutione diligenter adsuesecerunt, et ut est consuetudo honestorum hominum, curaverunt ut literas disceret, gestavitque in ludum literarium adhuc parvulum Georgii Aemilii pater, qui cum adhuc vivat, testis huius narrationis esse potest. (Av^r)

In part, this recognition of intelligence and the beginning of formal education recalls the 'coming to one's years' in saints' lives.²²³ Additionally, in the hagiographical narrative tradition, such attributes function as vocational signs that indicate future profession; doctors of the church, for example, commonly display an eager aptitude for learning.²²⁴ Beatus Rhenanus describes another humanist in precisely such terms in his biography of Erasmus.²²⁵ Luther here is not a developed figure with a rounded character, but rather an individual granted one extraordinary ability, namely the capacity to learn. This is again consistent with the processes of identity formation, or its lack of formation, found in medieval hagiography where children's personalities

²²³ See, for example: 'Do er zû ioren kam do wart er gesendet ...zû schûlen', in the *Die Elsässische 'Legenda Aurea'*, vol. 1, in *Das Normalcorpus*, ed. by Ulla Williams and Werner Williams-Knapp, Texte und Textgeschichte, 3 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1980), p. 499, 13-14.

²²⁴ See for example the description of St Thomas Aquinas, 'daz kint...was klug von jugent ûf. Nôch den tagen sînes alders sô enwas ime nimant glîch under anderen kinderen' in Hermann von Fritzlar, *Das Heiligenleben*, in Franz Pfeiffer, ed., *Deutsche Mystiker des vierzehnten Jahrhunderts*, I, 3-258 (Aalen: Scientia, 1962), p. 99, 13-15.

²²⁵ In the preface to the *Erasmi omnia opera* (1540), Beatus Rhenanus provides a brief biographical sketch of Erasmus in the following terms: Ingenium Erasmi mox eluxit, quum statim quae docebatur perciperet et fideliter retineret, aequales suos omnes superans...Is delectatus Erasmi profectu, nam coenobitae isti palliati quibusdam scholasticorum classibus praesunt et publice docent, complexus aliquando puerum 'Macte ingenio, Erasme,' inquit, 'tu ad summum eruditionis fastigium olim peruenies,' simulque osculum dedit et dimisit. The Latin text is reproduced in P.S. Allen, *Opus epistolarum des Erasmi Roteridami*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon P., 1906), pp. 56-71 (p. 57).

are formed at birth and intrinsic to their natures and lineage.²²⁶ As his parents and brother were not described in such terms at all, this prophetic sign is particular to Luther, the remarkable nature of which suggests that he is destined for greatness if not divinely favoured. Importantly, however, Luther's aptitude is seen partly as a consequence of parental concern for his education; Melanchthon confirms the qualities of Luther's parents, already indicated earlier in the *Historia*, by showing that it was their concern that led Luther to 'agnitionem et timorem Dei' as well as ensuring that he is taught to read (Av^r). This insistence on the contribution of Luther's parents reinforces the notion of parental responsibility for the proper raising of children that rests on Pauline authority, as seen in Ephesians 6. 4. Furthermore, education was praised by humanists as the most important gift that a father might give to his son; once again, Melanchthon is casting Luther in an established humanist tradition.²²⁷ This representation does not necessarily reflect Luther's initial schooling and, once again, indicates Melanchthon's rectification of the data to suit his interpretative principle.²²⁸ At the same time, Melanchthon reduces the significance of Margarethe's role in Luther's education. Importantly, all this takes place while Luther is still a boy of young age, a 'parvulus', and establishes the nature of the subsequent depiction.

Developing the notion of Luther not only benefiting from his education but almost outgrowing it, Melanchthon continues the representation of Luther's schooling by charting his progress through the Saxon educational system. Luther moves from the Mansfeld elementary school, 'ludu[s] literariu[s]', to grammar school. Thereafter, Melanchthon describes the contemporary Saxon grammar schools as 'mediocriter' (Av^r); the contrast between the adjectives describing the schools and Luther serves to highlight the latter's remarkable nature. Luther's progress from Mansfeld to Magdeburg and his subsequent move suggest, however, that at each turn he outgrew the curriculum on offer, 'nec tamen diutius anno mansit Lutherus Magdeburgae' (Avi^v), just as the hero of a medieval romance progresses and

²²⁶ See the examples cited by Schultz, p. 132.

²²⁷ See, for example, Pier Paolo Vergerio, *De Ingeniis Moribus et Liberalibus Studiis* (c. 1402), ed. by Attilio Gnesotto, in *Atti e memorie della R. Accademia delle Scienze, Lettere ed Arti in Padova*, 34 (1917-1918) (Padova: Accademia delle Scienze, 1917-18).

²²⁸ For a discussion of Luther's schooling, see Ernst Barnikol, 'Martin Luther in Magdeburg und die dortige Brüderschule', *Theologische Arbeiten aus dem Rheinischen Wissenschaftlichen Predigerverein* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1917), 1-62, and Kenneth A. Strand, 'Luther's Schooling in Magdeburg: A Note on Recent Views', in *Essays on Luther*, ed. by Kenneth A. Strand (Ann Arbor, MI: Ann Arbor, 1969), pp. 106-12.

succeeds from one test to another; in this sense, the narrative's movement suggests that Luther's educational quest moves through *basanoi* to reach stasis and its culmination in Wittenberg.

It is on Luther's arrival in Eisenach, however, that his advancement truly begins. Melanchthon reports that it is here that Luther 'audivit Praeceptorem rectius et dexterius tradentem Grammaticen, quam alibi tradebatur' (Avi^v). Melanchthon informs the reader that Luther was sent here as his mother was from an honest and old family of the area, recalling the earlier description of the Luthers and again stressing Luther's pedigree but without detailing the role of Margarethe Luther in her son's educational progress. Having described Luther's education in terms of a romance-like quest, Luther's skills emerge to the fore during his time at Eisenach:

hic absolvit grammaticum studium, cumque et vis ingenii acerrima esset, et imprimis ad eloquentiam idonea, celeriter aequalibus suis praecurret, et verbis et copia sermonis in loquendo, et in scribenda soluta oratione, et in Versibus coeteros adolescentes, qui una discebant, facile vicit. (Avi^v)

Luther is shown to triumph here in the skills praised by the humanists: knowledge of grammar; eloquence; and rhetoric.²²⁹ In surpassing all others, Luther again dominates the text as a remarkable figure but he is a figure who is remarkable in a limited sphere. In this respect, the *Historia* recalls medieval hagiographers who do not detail curricula, but rather stress the precocious wisdom and piety of their protagonists when at school.²³⁰ Here, however, Melanchthon not only stresses his protagonist's genius but highlights the curriculum that he [Melanchthon] values. In this way, Melanchthon adopts the common humanist practice of using biographical writing to support his own philosophical agenda, namely the humanist cause,²³¹ a theme which he will develop more fully later in the *Historia*.

The exposure to education that Luther receives occasions, as Melanchthon's narrative structure suggests, a conversion; yet it is a conversion that is brought about

²²⁹ See the discussion of humanist education in Charles G. Nauert, Jr, *Humanism and the Culture of Renaissance Europe*, New Approaches to European History (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), pp. 14-16.

²³⁰ See the description of Saint Alexis's education in *Alexius*, ed. by H.F. Massmann, *Sancti Alexis Leben in acht gereimten mittelhochdeutschen Behandlungen*, Bibliothek der gesamten deutschen National-Literatur (Quedlinburg; Leipzig: G. Basse, 1843), pp. 118-39, 146-148, 154-58, and 197-200.

²³¹ See p. 77, note 168.

both by Luther's own natural predispositions as well as the experiences he has undergone at school:

Degustata igitur literarum dulcedine, natura flagrans cupiditate discendi,
appetit Academiam, tanquam fontem omnium doctrinarum. (Avi^v)

The metaphor of sweetness encouraging the appetite, carried here through the use of the adjective 'dulcedo' and the verb 'degustare', recalls the stock trope of Renaissance biography and awakening to humanist learning.²³² The effect of Melanchthon's use of this common *topos* is to show Luther's success and progress as a result of and in terms of humanist learning, almost in spite of the prevailing scholastic curriculum. In this way, Melanchthon reinforces the importance of his own cause in the Reformation, namely humanism. This championing of the humanist cause is supported by Melanchthon's opinion that Luther's personality would have benefited, in fact, from greater exposure to humanist learning:

Et omnes artes ordine percipere tanta vis ingenii potuisset, si Doctores
idoneos invenisset, et fortassis ad leniendam vehemantiam naturae mitiora
studia Philosophiae, et cura formandae orationis profuissent. (Avi^{v-r})

The implicit statement here is, of course, that humanist learning is not only necessary but would have potentially furthered the Lutheran cause in shaping Luther's character more effectively; this is indicated in the contrast of the 'mitiora studia Philosophiae, et cura formandae orationis' with Luther's 'vehemantiam naturae'. Instead, Luther and the Lutheran movement, by extrapolation, were damaged by the prevailing scholastic curriculum:

Sed incidit Erfordiae in eius aetatis Dialecticen satis spinosam, quam cum
sagacitate ingenii praeceptionum causas et fontes melius quam coeteri
perspiceret, cito arripuit. (Avi^r)

²³² Weiss, 'Erasmus', p. 100.

This belief in the harmful effects of a scholastic education underlines the notion of education as capable of forming character, and therefore breaks with the classical and medieval view of ‘psychology’ and the concept of static developmental personality. In the *Historia*, Melanchthon’s schoolboy Luther casts a prophetic shadow over Luther’s later fame as a theologian and academic, reminiscent of the saint of medieval texts. The depiction of his character remains, nevertheless, largely undeveloped; such typological prefiguration in the narrative models does not need to be continuous from childhood onwards, but rather an exemplary episode of the individual’s character. As a result, the extraordinary childhood qualities present ultimately cast Luther as an adult in child’s clothing. This depiction is entirely consistent with inherited models of biographical writing, and reveals the way in which the narrative elements shape historical understanding.

University

The prominence and favour attached to humanism are again highlighted in the depiction of Luther’s university education, where Luther’s emergence as a reformer is once more cast in the language of the humanist’s discovery of literary and scholarly vocations. The narrative logic of the *Historia* suggests that it is exposure to humanist learning that leads Luther to various discoveries and ultimately to the path that he chose to follow. Having tasted the ‘literarum dulcedine’, Luther is encouraged to read classical writings further but not as normal boys do:

Cumque mens avida doctrinae, plura et meliora requireret, legit ipse
pleraque veterum Latinorum scriptorum monumenta, Ciceronis, Virgilii,
Livii et aliorum. Haec legebat, non ut pueri, verba tantum excerptentes, sed ut
humanae vitae doctrinam, aut imagines, Quare et consilia horum scriptorum
et sententias proprius aspiciebat, et ut erat memoria fideli et firma, pleraque
ei lecta et audita, in conspectu et ob oculos erant. Sic igitur in iuventute
eminebat, ut toti Academiae Lutheri ingenium admirationi esset. (Avi^f)

The insistence that Luther read such works as the teaching of human life, ‘humanae vitae doctrinam’, and was able to keep their contents before his eyes, ‘ob oculos’, recalls pedagogical writings and the standard metaphors of Renaissance biographies

of humanist figures, in whose terms Luther is very clearly cast.²³³ The acquisition of classical learning, Melanchthon argues, is a process of enlightenment that guides Luther; the language used here is that of intellectual conversion, common to humanist biographies, and importantly Luther's conversion is to Cicero *et al* rather than to St Paul, thereby stressing the primacy of humanism in evangelical studies. Simultaneously, Luther's gifts of memory recall hagiography and the miraculous attributes of the young saint.

This foundation in humanist learning leads Luther initially to a study of the law and, thereafter, to the monastery. The effect of the narrative structure reveals Melanchthon's belief that Luther's study of theology and in effect his vocation were consequences of the grounding he first received in classical literature. Given that Luther's schooling and university education were primarily in the scholastic tradition,²³⁴ Melanchthon is once again engaging in an act of rectification. While the University of Erfurt was recognised for its openness to new thought at the end of the fifteenth century, it was seen as a representative of the *via moderna* school of scholasticism. Even if its teaching remained medieval in all essentials, a liberal atmosphere reigned and the university functioned as the meeting place of the two opposing tendencies of scholasticism and humanism. It is contended that by 1520 all of the five large *bursæ* were dominated by masters sympathetic to humanism, but equally accepted that to gain such positions, these men were moderate and compromise-minded figures.²³⁵ The trope of education, inherent to the classical model of the genre, demands the treatment of Luther's education which Melanchthon is compelled to correct to humanism so that Luther's, and the Reformation's, success is cast as a direct consequence. As such, history is very much at the mercy of both generic models and Melanchthon's interpretative principle. Interestingly, the *Historia* makes no reference to Luther's motivation for his monastic vocation, an act which has come to attract great significance in subsequent accounts. There is,

²³³ See for example Beatus Rhenanus's short biography of Erasmus: Hoc socio adiutus et accensus nullum Latinorum autorum volumen non excussit. Diu noctuque erant in literis. Tempus quod aequales alii iocis somno comensationibus ignauiter absumebant, hii duo libris euolendis et exercendo stilo impendebant. The text is reproduced in P.S. Allen, *Opus epistolarum des Erasmi Roteridami*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon P., 1906), pp. 56-71 (p. 57).

²³⁴ On the influences from Luther's education, see Helmar Junghans, 'Der Einfluß des Humanismus auf Luthers Entwicklung bis 1517', *Luther Jahrbuch*, 37 (1970), 58-60. See also Helmar Junghans, *Der junge Luther und die Humanisten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985), pp. 31-49 and pp. 53-62.

²³⁵ Erich Kleinedamm, *Universitas Studii Erfordiensis: Überblick über die Geschichte der Universität Erfurt im Mittelalter 1392-1521*, 2 vols (Leipzig: St Benno, 1959), 2, pp. 143-144.

nevertheless, an implicit suggestion of the Stotternheim legend and the lightning strike in the description of Luther's sudden decision:

Sed brevi post, cum natus esset annum unum et vicesimum, subito praeter parentum et propinquorum opinionem, venit ad Collegium Monachorum Augustinianorum Erphordiae, seque recipi petit. (Avi^r-Avii^v)

The absence of the lightning strike is noteworthy. Developing the significance of Luther's 'humanist' studies, Melanchthon shows that these not only led him to his study of theology, Patristics, with particular credit given to Augustine, again expressed in the terminology of humanist biography, but ultimately to his study of the Bible which he is able to conduct in Latin and Greek thanks to his studies and, importantly, the work of Erasmus:

Non igitur paupertas, sed studium pietatis eum in illud viae monasticae genus induxit, in quo etsi doctrinam in scholis usitatam quotidie discebat, et Sententiarum legebat, et in Disputationibus publicis labyrinthos aliis inextricabiles, diserte multis admirantibus explicabat, tamen quia in eo vitae genere non famam ingenii, sed alimenta pietatis quaerebat, haec studia tanquam parerga tractabat, et facile arripiebat illas scholasticas methodos (Avii^r).

In this way, Melanchthon acknowledges Luther's scholastic training but orchestrates Luther's gradual recovery of truth with details of specific authors and teachers found in other contemporary biographies, Cicero, Virgil and Livy, the most prized authors of the humanist movement. The introduction of Luther's scriptural studies so late in the narrative, and logically much later than theological studies would have occurred in the novitiate, has the effect of acknowledging his biblical reading only after it has been connected linguistically to humanist learning:

Postea enarrare Epistolam ad Romanos coepit, deinde Psalmos, haec scripta sic illustravit, ut post longam et obscuram noctem, nova doctrinae lux oriri videretur, omnium piorum et prudentum iudicio. (B^v)

Melanchthon shows that it is humanism that allowed Luther access to and understanding of the most important sources of truth. The narrative casts Luther as the logical successor to Erasmus's works, the epitome of the early-modern humanist, without whom Luther's reformation would not have been possible. In order to reinforce this argument, Melanchthon immediately follows this statement with his account of the indulgence controversy and the posting of the Ninety-Five Theses.

Within the representation of Luther's monastic and university education, Melanchthon draws on further hagiographical *topoi* once again to insinuate Luther's status as a divinely-favoured agent. This occurs, for example, in the references to Luther's ability to survive on little food and drink. Adopting the narrative unit of a personal anecdote, Melanchthon describes Luther in terms of the saint's miraculous ability to sustain himself on little else than his faith, and a few morsels of bread and fish. Even Melanchthon's choice of fish, herring, reinforces this stock trope to build a composite picture of Luther's sanctity:

Erat autem natura, quod saepe miratus sum, in corpore nec parvo nec imbecilli, valde modici cibi et potus, vidi continuis quatuor diebus, cum quidem recte valeret, prorsus nihil edentem aut bibentem, vidi saepe alias multis diebus quotidie exiguo pane et halece contentum esse. (Avii^v)

This adoption of common hagiographical motifs may also be seen in the acknowledgement of Luther's *Anfechtungen*, which not only testify to Luther's piety but again act as the consequence of a further conversion event, namely the death of a friend.²³⁶ *Anfechtungen* were acknowledged to be an aspect of late-medieval piety and such episodes of despair are common to many saints' lives; while Luther supposedly suffered throughout his life from the affliction, their isolated presence here in the narrative does connect Luther linguistically with the holy figures of hagiography. To a large extent, the narrative suggests similar effects to that of the mysterious 'old man' in the Erfurt cloister who counselled and consoled Luther during his troubles (Avii^f):

²³⁶ Luther's *Anfechtungen* are often translated into English as overwhelming spiritual 'terrors' or 'despair' which bring the individual to a religious crisis and a need for forgiveness; for a closer definition of the term, see Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther: Eine Einführung in sein Leben und Werk* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1981), pp. 38-44.

Et senis cuiusdam sermonibus in Augustiniano Collegio Erphordiae saepe se confirmatum esse narrabat, cui cum consternationes suas exponeret, audivit eum de fide multa disserentem, seque deductum aiebat ad Symbolum, in quo dicitur, Credo remissionem peccatorum. (Avii^v)

This figure is again a classic *topos* of medieval hagiography, suggesting a divine messenger sent to help the fledgling ‘saint’ in his hour of need.²³⁷ In this respect, Melancthon’s *Historia* displays several conversion episodes within the short narrative of Luther’s youth and education; Luther’s initial awakening to education; his overcoming of the ‘crabbed’ scholasticism; the sudden entry to the cloister; the death of his friend; and the presence of the ‘senis’ in the cloister. It is significant, however, that the lightning strike at Stotternheim, with its mystical and miraculous overtones, is absent. The multiple nature of these events stresses Luther’s sanctity as well as his slow awakening to the divinely pre-destined task that draws on elements of the romance. In turn, each event will be recast as a determinative episode that led Luther to the cloister; all are provided by Melancthon with only a hint of their subsequent valency.

Post-educational effects of humanist study.

Having clearly indicated that Luther’s education only truly progressed as a result of humanist influence rather than the prevailing scholasticism, Melancthon goes on to describe Luther’s theological teachings in terms of the humanists’ recovery of eloquence.

²³⁷ The status of the ‘senex’ as a divine messenger is developed more clearly in the other major sixteenth-century Protestant ‘biography’ of Luther by Mathesius: Weil er [Luther] aber tag und nacht im Kloster studiret und betet und sich darneben mit fasten und wachen kasteiet unnd abmergelt, war er stetig betrübt unnd trawrig, unnd all sein Meßhalten ihm kein trost geben wolte, schickt ihm Gott ein alten Bruder zu im Kloster zum Beichtuatter, der tröstet ihn hertzlich unnd weiset ihn auff die gnedige vergebung der sünden im *Symbolo apostolorum* unnd leret in auß Sanct Bernhards predigt, er müste für sich selber auch glauben, das im der barmhertzig Gott und Vatter durch das einige opffer unnd blut seines gehorsamen Sones vergebung aller sünden erworben und durch den heiligen Geist inn der Apostolischen Kirchen durchs wort der Absolution verkündigen ließ. Johannes Mathesius, *Historien von des Ehrwürdigen in Gott Seligen thewren Manns Gottes Doctoris Martini Luthers anfang, lehr, leben vnd sterben* (Nürnberg, 1566), in *Johannes Mathesius: Ausgewählte Werke*, III, ed. G. Loesche (Prague: Calwe, 1906), pp. 21-22.

Huius doctrinae dulcedine pii omnes valde capiebantur, Et eruditis gratum erat, quasi ex tenebris, carcere, squalore educi Christum, Prophetas, Apostolos, conspici discrimen Legis, et Evangelii, promissionum Legis, et promissionis Evangelicae, Philosophiae et Evangelii, quod certe non extabat in Thoma, Scoto et similibus, Iustitiae spiritualis et rerum politicarum. (Bii^v)

In so doing, Melanchthon once again marks a contrast between the barbarous, monkish sophistry, caught in darkness, gaol, and squalor, and the sweeter teaching of Luther's theology. As Weiss indicates,²³⁸ Luther presents his theological doctrine with humanist *dulcedo* to an audience described as both *pii* and *eruditi*, ultimately Christian humanists. This consistent preference for *dulcedo* throughout the *Historia* corresponds not to the rhetorical techniques of *instructio* or *persuasio*, the hallmarks of scholastic learning, but to the aesthetic element of rhetoric, *delicto*. In this way, humanism and humanist methodology are shown to provide the philological reconstruction of the meaning of Scripture. Melanchthon has shown that the foundations of the knowledge and skills that have been crucial to this process are to be found in Luther's earliest academic career, partly self-discovered, and without which the necessary reforms would not have taken place.

4. Concluding Remarks

History does not preserve the acts of men; all that remains after the completion of an act is the representation of its remembrance. Concerned with not only the external deeds of its subject but also his character and motivation, the problematical nature of this remembrance stands at the heart of biography, in which a distinction may be drawn between remembrance and memory; the first is the uncritical, often spontaneous, act of calling episodes of the past back to the present, while the latter is a deliberate act of constructing past episodes. The memorial process imposes a creative, artificial shape on historical events as an interpretative process that might stand in opposition to a notion of historical truth.

Melanchthon's *Historia* and its depiction of Luther's childhood demonstrate the difficulty of tailoring this memorial process to historical truth. By combining

²³⁸ Weiss, 'Erasmus', p. 100.

elements of hagiography, classical and Renaissance biography, Melanchthon produces an image of Luther as a prophetic figure with divine favour. By adopting tropes of medieval hagiography within the narrative framework of βίοί, Melanchthon indicates not only Luther's talents but stresses divine influence at work which in turn legitimizes Luther's cause throughout his life. Simultaneously, there is a quasi-replacement of the religious saint of the medieval hagiography with a humanist 'saint' that stresses the role and importance of humanism in the Reformation; indeed, the depiction of Luther's childhood in the *Historia* argues that humanism was not just a stage of his studies but their culmination and integral to evangelical reform. Through several 'conversions' to humanism, Luther slowly develops in skills that allow him to become a Reformation hero. Developing the depiction found in the funeral oration, Melanchthon casts Luther as a voice in the wilderness, bringing light to the world; this essentially iterative depiction places him among Old Testament prophets against the insane backdrop of medieval Catholicism and Scholasticism. In turn, this backdrop research into the biographical writings of minority groups has shown that outside reality has been typically portrayed as insane, partly so that the subject's own idiosyncrasies appear less surprising.²³⁹

The implications of the similarity between the *Historia* and familiar narrative models are clear. First, Melanchthon drew on ways of writing history, established in classical biography, to represent Luther's life. Secondly, that these established ways were anchored in orthodox narrative models of biography, which have the effect of legitimising Luther's life and deeds. The genre demands a treatment of Luther's childhood; however, for this treatment to correspond with Melanchthon's thesis of the necessity of humanism, he must first rectify Luther's upbringing and education. Finally, the narrative model used by Melanchthon supports his explicit understanding of his friend as a key figure in ecclesiastical history, drawing as it does on the master-narratives of Christian lives as well as classical philosophers. The writing of history, in Melanchthon's *Historia*, is thus central to his understanding of Luther the man, and thereby plays an instrumental role in the reform movement's cause as a process of historical legitimation. Melanchthon's short narrative emplotment of Luther's childhood is all the more important given its lasting effect

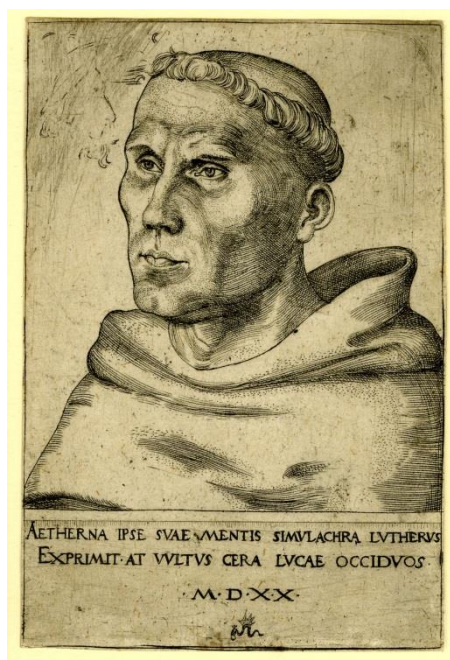
²³⁹ Roger Rosenblatt, 'Black Autobiography: Life as the Death Weapon', in James Olney, ed., *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. P., 1980), pp. 169-180.

on the Protestant understanding and narrative description of the movement's founder; the treatment of Luther's early development was inserted almost verbatim into Melchior Adam's *Vitae Theologorum*,²⁴⁰ a standard Protestant reference work until the mid-eighteenth century. Thus, Melanchthon's view of Luther's childhood was transmitted for at least two hundred years, thereby influencing the Protestant *Lutherbild* in many subsequent accounts from that period onwards, and can still be traced in current biographies of Luther.

²⁴⁰ Melchior Adam, *Vitae Germanorum theologorum* (Heidelberg: Jonas Rosa, 1620).

Chapter Four:

Monasticism



The problem of depicting Luther's life as a monk in the Erfurt and Wittenberg cloisters has lain at heart of any biographical representation of the reformer since the sixteenth century. Few facts are known beyond the fact that Luther abandoned his legal studies and sought admission in 1505 to the reformed cloister of the Augustinian Eremites in Erfurt; following his novitiate, he progressed rapidly within the order and with considerable success, receiving advancement as a priest and academic theologian as well as undertaking various diplomatic duties on behalf of his order.²⁴¹ Nevertheless, Luther later reported that throughout his time in the cloister, he suffered from a series of spiritual and psychological crises;²⁴² the

²⁴¹ See, for example, the description of the monastic period in Peter Manns, 'Luthers Erfurter Klosterzeit: vom Novizen zum Priester-Mönch', *Martin Luther* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1982), pp. 25-57 (p. 27).

²⁴² One of Luther's more vociferous sixteenth-century critics depicts the *Anfechtungen* as a symptom of demonic possession, see Johannes Cochlaeus, *Commentaria de Actis et Scriptis Martini Lutheri Saxonis* (Mainz: F. Behem, 1549), Ai. By the end of the nineteenth century, this view had been transformed into an understanding of Luther's own unsuitability for the monastic life by Catholic historians such as Hartmann Grisar, *Luther* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1911), p. 5, while Protestant authors began to view monasticism itself as the cause of Luther's difficulties; see, for example, Heinrich Boehmer, *Der junge Luther* (Gotha: Flamberg, 1929), pp. 95-97. For an attempt at a more balanced and recent approach, see Manns, pp. 82-88.

terrores or *Anfechtungen* are an established part of most narratives treating Luther's monastic period, and have been diversely interpreted over the last five hundred years as both an indication of Luther's intrinsic unsuitability for his vocation as well as the harmful consequence of monastic practices. Beyond such few established facts, however, little more is known of Luther's time in the cloister,²⁴³ and yet his monastic period has become the source of many legends by both Protestant and Catholic writers. While Luther continued to wear the monastic habit until the mid-1520s,²⁴⁴ his monastic period is understood here to refer to the time from his admission to 1517 after which his life takes a very different turn. Luther's monastic period is inherently problematic for historians of the Reformation, particularly those who have approached the subject from confessional backgrounds.

1. Introduction

Traditionally, Catholic historians have approached the representation of this period of Luther's life with a cultural, if not personal, understanding and acceptance of monasticism. For such writers, the monastic system was, and is, a legitimate and positive practice; where difficulties were encountered by Luther, such problems, narratively represented by the *terrores*, were seen as the failings of the individual rather than the system, although recent Catholic scholarship has acknowledged that there had long been a tradition of people who reacted negatively to the practice.²⁴⁵ Therefore, Luther's *terrores* have been interpreted as a symbol of his personal unsuitability for the monastic vocation, if not an indicator of demonic possession.²⁴⁶

²⁴³ The absence of established historical record regarding Luther's monastic life has led at least one historian to describe the period as Luther's 'years of silence'; see for example Richard Marius, *Martin Luther: The Christian between God and Death* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. P., 2000), pp. 55-78.

²⁴⁴ The Polish diplomat Dantiscus reports having met Luther in lay clothing in 1523, and Luther preached on the afternoon of 9th October 1524 for the first time without his habit: both sources quoted in Julius Köstlin, 'Priesterehe und Austritt aus den Klöstern: Luthers Kutte und Kloster', in *Luther: sein Leben und seine Schriften*, 5 (Berlin: Kauer, 1903), p. 562.

²⁴⁵ One of the earlier Catholic reappraisals of the *terrores* is to be found in Joseph Lortz, *Die Reformation in Deutschland*, I (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1941), pp. 162-165, and is developed by Manns, pp. 82-88.

²⁴⁶ The 'classic' extreme Catholic view of Luther's terrors, found in Johannes Cochlaeus's *Commentaria de Actis et Scriptis Martini Lutheri Saxonis*, was repeated over the next four hundred years, becoming an established part of the Catholic *Lutherbild*, and its legacy may still be found in twentieth-century Catholic writing; see, for example, Hartmann Grisar, *Luther* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1911), p. 5, and Jacques Maritain, *Trois Réformateurs: Luther – Descartes – Rousseau* (Paris: Plon, 1925), p. 10.

While first-generation Protestants were at least familiar with monasticism,²⁴⁷ they were faced with a difficulty other than ignorance in depicting Luther's monastic period, namely how to present a system that the movement's founder actively criticised as being inherently 'bad' but one which he had chosen, nevertheless, to enter willingly. Indeed, in the Protestant interpretation of Luther as a divinely-favoured and chosen figure, his attack and abandonment of monasticism are seen as legitimate while any difficulties he encountered there are seen as the failings of an inherently faulted system; circular logic prevails and the 'facts' of Luther's existence and success are seen as proof of divine favour and the truth of Luther's criticism.²⁴⁸ This traditional interpretation is further complicated in later generations of Protestant historians for whom monasticism is at best a totally alien practice.

The depiction of the monastic period poses difficulties, therefore, for historians who have typically approached the subject from a confessional background. Such historians have sought to determine either that Luther's difficulties in the monastery were a result of his own psychological unsuitability to the monastic vocation or that monasticism *per se* was, and is, damaging and brought about the difficulties Luther had. As Luther's experiences in the cloister have traditionally been viewed as preparation for his theological writings, their representation and valorization are crucial to an understanding of the Reformation and church history.

2. Monasticism in Melancthon's *Historia*

While Melancthon was of course more than just a mere supporter of the Protestant Reformation, he has long been granted the status of conciliator in the Lutheran party who maintained positive relationships with Catholics following the schism.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁷ All first-generation reformers had of course been brought up and educated in the Roman Catholic Church, and many had at one time been members of religious houses or been in orders; the most obvious examples of such experiences are Erasmus, a former Augustinian, and Bucer, who had previously been a Dominican priest.

²⁴⁸ Luther attacked monastic practice most famously in the pamphlet *De votis monasticis* (1521), written during his stay at the Wartburg, in which he made clear his belief that monastic vows were invalid and contrary to both evangelical liberty and faith. See Martin Luther, *De votis monasticis*, in WA, 8, pp. 573-669; for a discussion of Luther's attitude toward monasticism, see H. M. Stamm, *Luthers Stellung zum Ordensleben*, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte, vol. 101 (Wiesbaden: Zabern, 1980).

²⁴⁹ See Klemens Löffler's positive representation of Melancthon, 'Philip Melancthon', in the *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, ed. by C. G. Herbermann, vol. 10 (New York: Robert Appleton, 1910), pp.

Although subject to generic and mythic influences, reminiscent of the accounts of Luther's origins, the various representations of Melanchthon's background suggest a pious and god-fearing family. The inhabitants of Bretten are described as 'humanitarian, ingenuous, polite and good',²⁵⁰ while Melanchthon's grandfather, Claus Schwartzerd, is described as 'ein gut frommer Mann', who raised the reformer's father and uncle 'zu Gottesfurcht und aller Tugend von Jugend fleißig',²⁵¹ while Melanchthon's parents were known for their piety, charity, and devotions. In his will, Melanchthon's father left his children to the care of the 'true church' and required them to be in Church on all holy days,²⁵² before going on to make a prophecy of his son's future greatness in the events of the world.²⁵³ Born and raised in a prosperous, well-established and pious Catholic family,²⁵⁴ Melanchthon excelled in the Catholic educational system,²⁵⁵ and benefitted greatly from the humanist influences of the time as well as family members. While Melanchthon never sought ordination, he did study Theology at the University of Tübingen; he was deeply grounded in the Roman Catholic faith and belonged to the leading intelligentsia of Catholic Germany on the eve of the Reformation.²⁵⁶ He was, therefore, at least familiar with and not ignorant of monastic practices from outside the system. At first glance, the *Historia* provides an apparently straightforward and unembellished account of Luther's life in the monastery, and it certainly lacks the marked confessional extremes and ignorance of monasticism typical of later depictions.²⁵⁷

151-154; the text is available on-line at <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10151a.htm>> [last accessed 20.11.13].

²⁵⁰ See the description provided by Johannes Camerarius, *Vita Philippi Melanchthonis* (Leipzig; The Hague: Ernest Voegelin; Adrian Vlacq, 1566; 1655), Aⁱ.

²⁵¹ For further details on the Schwartzerd family, see the account of Melanchthon's life written by the Wittenberg professors in 1560, 'Scripta ad vitam et obitum Melancth.', in *CR*, X, 10, pp. 254-292 (p.255).

²⁵² See *CR*, 11, p. 24.

²⁵³ Melanchthon cites his father's prophecy in a letter to Georg Fabricius in 1554, *CR*, 8, p. 367.

²⁵⁴ See the discussion of Melanchthon's background in Robert Stupperich, *Der unbekannte Melanchthon: Wirken, Denken des Præceptor Germaniæ in neuer Sicht* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1961), pp. 11-13.

²⁵⁵ Melanchthon's ability was quickly recognised and he attained his *baccalaureus* at the age of fourteen at Heidelberg but the University refused him his *magister artium* as a result of his age, forcing him to move to Tübingen; in fact, despite Melanchthon's depiction of Luther as a 'puer senex' in the *Historia*, this rôle might have better been applied to himself. See the description of Melanchthon's education in James W. Richard, *Philip Melanchthon: The Protestant Preceptor of Germany 1497-1560* (New York: Putnam, 1898), pp. 12-29.

²⁵⁶ Melanchthon's status as Reuchlin's nephew provided him with access to humanist groups in Germany; see Richard Marius, *Martin Luther*, p. 28.

²⁵⁷ Despite ecumenical developments, even more recent accounts of Luther's life by Protestant scholars continue to display a somewhat curious attitude to monasticism and regard it as a purely

Closer analysis reveals the text to be a highly sophisticated account with a variety of inheritances and influences that support the interpretative aim of the text as well as indicate the narrative framework within which Melanchthon is working. Alongside his attempt to provide an accurate account of Luther's life,²⁵⁸ the *Historia* seeks to justify the Lutheran reformation through its depiction of Luther's life in the monastery, at the same time as championing the humanist educational cause.

The overtly stated aim of the text is to present a faithful portrait of the reformer that will preserve his memory for future generations whilst correcting various slanders made of Luther that were current at the time of the text's production. It would seem, however, that through the text's foregrounding of humanism, almost to Luther's discredit at times, that Melanchthon wished to stress the importance of humanist education, and that is here it the indirect aim of the text lies.

The analysis of the treatment of the monastic period in the *Historia* will take into account its overall narrative structure by identifying the generic emplotment of this section of the biography. In addition, the identification of tropes used in the representation of Luther's time as a monk will further an understanding of which narrative models were inherited or have influenced its production, as well as revealing the general construction of the various episodes depicted.

3. Mythic Criticism

Post-structuralist theory argues that archetypal plot structures are used subconsciously as well as deliberately by historians and by authors of purely 'literary' texts to construct an image of the past as well as in figurative writing;²⁵⁹ the historian, just as the writer of fiction, draws on latent narrative models to represent a chain of initially disparate and unrelated historical events to create an episode and

historical practice; see, for example, Hans Jochen Genthe, *Martin Luther: Sein Leben und Denken* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), pp. 46-90.

²⁵⁸ Et multi boni et sapientes viri adhuc vivunt, quibus cum sciret seriem harum rerum notam esse, fuisset ridiculum, aliam historiam, ut fit interdum in poematis, comminisci. Sed quia editionem talis historiae fatalis ipsius dies antevertit, nos iisdem de rebus ea, quae partim ex ipso audivimus, partim ipse vidimus, bona fide recitaturi sumus. (Av^v).

²⁵⁹ Hayden White explores the relationship between historical writings and mythic structures, largely building on the work of Northrop Frye, in 'Historical Text as Literary Artefact', in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. P., 1985), pp. 81-100, and Hayden White, 'Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth in Historical Emplotment', in *Figural Realism* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Univ. P., 1999), pp.27-43.

endow it with meaning. Frye provides a definition of the basic *mythoi*, or pre-generic plot structures, as romance, comedy, tragedy and irony;²⁶⁰ in turn, Frye's definitions enable the *mythos* of a text to be identified, which provides an additional level of analysis which may indicate whether the plot structure complements the interpretative principle. Theorists such as White argue that while a particular narrative structure may lend itself more easily or obviously to an encoding of the various historical facts of a subject's life, different encodings of the basic 'facts' are possible that would produce an alternative, and theoretically acceptable, plot structure. While such theories have been generated on a large scale, no practical analysis has been carried out to assess the validity of this theory. It is to be expected that historians and biographers working from different ideological backgrounds may encode the data differently, and that confessional historians writing Luther's story may well draw on different narrative models to write up the same historical data with different ideological intentions in mind, while drawing on common narrative models of writing history.

The first Protestant accounts of Luther's life sought not only to represent Luther's life but also to justify his actions and the course of the Reformation; with scant historical data to hand, the first favourable representations of Luther emplotted his life in a similar way, drawing on a mixture of narrative structures but one principal *mythos*, that of the romance. While the choice of this plot structure might have been subconscious, the effects of such a choice reinforce the positive valorization and interpretation of Luther's life offered. Given that few documented historical data on Luther's life exist, particularly regarding his early life, much biographical information has simply been 'inherited' from the earliest accounts;²⁶¹ a vertical comparison of various accounts of Luther's life from the sixteenth century until the present day reveals significant conceptual and narratological similarities,

²⁶⁰ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. P., 1957; 2000). pp. 186-206.

²⁶¹ The most obvious example of this is the date of Luther's birthday which has canonically been accepted as 10 November 1483; a closer reading of source materials indicates, however, that this date originated with Melanchthon who had in fact provided an alternative date at another time and subsequently 'rectified' his choice in light of his own astronomical thinking. Despite such inauspicious beginnings, however, this date for Luther's birth has been accepted until recently almost universally as accurate by both Protestant and Catholic historians. See the description of the debate surrounding the date of Luther's birth in Reinhard Staats, 'Noch einmal: Luthers Geburtsjahr 1484', in *Melanchthons Astrologie: Der Weg der Sternwissenschaft von Humanismus und Reformation*, ed. by Jürgen G. H. Hoppmann (Wittenberg: Drei Kastanien Verlag, 1997), pp. 51-53. See, also, 'Childhood' in this thesis, pp. 71-104.

and the choice of plot structure present in the first Protestant writings has determined the subsequent confessional understanding of Luther. Furthermore, the choice of *mythos* does not appear to have undergone significant reassessment, even in more recent writings, thereby allowing a purely literary aspect of historical writing to dictate the historical understanding of the subject. In this context, the *Historia* as the first major biography has particular significance in establishing the genre of subsequent narratives that have shaped the Protestant understanding of Luther in particular.

By comparing the representation of Luther's life in terms of its narrative structures with that of the other major sixteenth-century reformers, Backus shows that there are similarities not only in various accounts of Luther's life seen developmentally or vertically, that is to say the construction of the *Lutherbild*, but also between accounts of Luther's life as well as those of the Calvin, Zwingli, and other early reformers;²⁶² as such, the Reformation movement drew on established structures, both horizontally as well as vertically, to narrate the various movements' leaders while simultaneously establishing narrative models that determined future representations as well as accounts of those lives. In this way, Melanchthon's account acquires a wider influence beyond the narrower confines of Lutheran history into wider Protestant life-writing on figures in ecclesiastical history.

4. The Mythic Structure in Melanchthon's *Historia*

The romance plot structure is the narrative of the 'wish-fulfilment dream' in which ideals are projected from a ruling élite, and in which the virtuous hero embodies the author's ideals while the villain represents the threats to the hero's triumph.²⁶³ The genre is marked by a nostalgic desire to return to a golden age, represented in the ideals of the hero and the essential plot elements.

The essential plot element in romance is adventure, providing the *mythos* with a sequential and processional form; in its most naïve form, romance describes

²⁶² See Irena Backus, *Life Writing in Reformation Europe: Lives of Reformers by Friends, Disciples and Foes*, St Andrews Studies in Reformation History (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

²⁶³ Frye defines pre-generic narratives as *mythoi* which provide the reader with expected, generic plots; these are subsequently refined into romance, comedy, irony, and satire. See the definition of the various *mythoi* in Frye, pp. 186-206.

the life of a central character who processes from one adventure to another *ad nauseam* until the author collapses, without the character developing in age or character. The romance might also describe a series of adventures that lead ultimately to a climactic or major adventure, resulting in the literary form of the quest. The complete form of the romance is the successful quest with three main stages: the *agon* or perilous journey and minor adventures; the *pathos* or crucial struggle, often a battle, in which either the hero or the antagonist must die; and finally the *anagnorisis* or recognition and exaltation of the hero. Thus, the romance describes the passage from struggle through a point of ritual death to a recognition scene, or *cognitio*.

Within the genre, there are two basic characters: the protagonist-hero and the antagonist-enemy; the nearer the romance is to a myth, the greater the divine attributes attached to the hero and the greater the diabolical attributes attached to the enemy. The central form is dialectical with all action focused on the conflict between the hero and his enemy, and the ultimate victory of the hero's and, by implication the reader's, values. The enemy is often associated with darkness, winter, confusion, sterility, age, *etc.*, while the hero is the opposite. The hero is often in possession of unusual wisdom or power. The reward for such a quest in the romance might be wealth, power, virtue or even a bride; such brides are often to be found in a perilous, forbidden or tabooed place, and are often rescued by the hero; the removal of some stigma from the lady is also a common theme. The antagonist is often a sinister figure, in the form of a giant, ogre, witch or magician, with clear parental origins. Subtlety of characterization is abnormal, with all characters being either for or against the quest, and thereby the hero. If they assist it, they are simply gallant and pure; if they do not, they are evil. Those for the quest belong to the *eiron* group.²⁶⁴

There are six basic phases to romance: (1) the myth of the birth of the hero from mysterious origin; (2) the innocent youth of the hero presenting a pleasant world where the hero is overshadowed by his parents and companions; (3) the

²⁶⁴ The *eiron* is one of the three types of comic character identified by the *Tractatus*: the *eiron*, or self-deprecator; the *alazon*, or impostor; and the *bomolochoi*, or buffoon. Frye suggests that Aristotle's *agroikos*, or churl, can be added as a fourth member of the group. The contest between the *eiron* and the *alazon* forms the basis of comic action, while the remaining pair polarizes the mood. For further information on these characters, see the *Tractatus Coislinianus*, available in *Aristotle Poetics with the Tractatus Coislinianus, Reconstruction of Poetics II*, and the *Fragments of the On Poets* (Bk. 1), ed. and trans. by Richard Janko (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1987), and a discussion of their roles in Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 172, and Lane Cooper, *An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy* (New York: Harcourt, 1922).

normal quest theme; (4) the happier society is visible throughout the action emerging in the last moments; the integrity of the innocent world is maintained against the assault of experience; (5) a reflective, idyllic view of experience from above where a contemplative withdrawal from action presides and experience is comprehended not mysterious; (6) the *penseroso* stage that marks the end of movement from active to contemplative action; the central image of this phase is the old man in the tower or some form of symposium narrative. Having established Luther's birth and childhood earlier in the *Historia*, the monastic period section of the narrative forms the *agon* and major quest of the romance. It is here that the hero will undergo a series of educational adventures that will enable him to progress. Within this section of the narrative, there are clear affinities with the romance *mythos* and the depiction of the monastic period.

In terms of the explicit interpretative principle of the text, it is difficult to assert the projection of Melanchthon's values on the hero's character, given the close personal and theological relationships of the two men; nevertheless, the existence of a shared intellectual position provides the first similarity between the *Historia* and the romantic genre. This is seen, for example, in the openly approving tone of the text as well as in direct authorial commentary. Unsurprisingly, Melanchthon leaves the reader in little doubt as to where his sympathies lie; this is indicated by the use of overtly positive adjectives to describe Luther, changing the tone from simply complimentary to outright eulogy:

Non igitur paupertas, sed studium pietatis eum in illud viae monasticae genus induxit, in quo etsi doctrinam in scholis usitatam quotidie discebat, et Sententiariorum legebat, et in Disputationibus publicis labyrinthos aliis inextricabiles, diserte multis admirantibus explicabat, tamen quia in eo vitae genere non famam ingenii, sed alimenta pietatis quaerebat, haec studia tanquam parerga tractabat, et facile arripiebat illas scholasticas methodos.

(Avii^r)

Melanchthon's portrayal of Luther's character in the monastic period, as throughout the *Historia*, is clearly sympathetic, and draws here on classic imagery of the humanist scholar as he enlightens his audience and leads it out of the maze.

Moreover, through Luther's theological writings, the Church is returned to Her true ideals and practice, connecting with the myth of the golden age found in the romance. This notion of the golden age connects with the overall historical understanding of the course of ecclesiastical history, presented by Melanchthon, as being one of decline in which the ideals of the Church have been debased and neglected and it is only with the coming of the Reformation that the 'Church' is able to return to its founding principles.²⁶⁵ This is seen in the *Historia*'s treatment of the monastic period in Luther's preference for orthodox authors who are shown proleptically to agree with his own views:

Tunc et Augustini libros legere coepit, ubi et in Psalmorum enarratione, et in libro de Spiritu et litera, multas perspicuas sententias reperit, quae confirmabant hanc de fide doctrinam, et consolationem, quae in ipsius pectore accensa erat. Nec tamen prorsus reliquit Sententiariorum, Gabrielem et Cammeracensem paene ad verbum memoriter recitare poterat. Diu multumque legit scripta Occam, huius acumen anteferebat Thomae et Scoto. Diligenter et Gersonem legerat, Sed omnia Augustini monumenta et saepe legerat, et optime meminerat. (Aviii^v)

It is significant that Luther's preferred authors stand at the heart of Catholicism, and it is clear that Melanchthon is thereby stressing the orthodoxy of Luther's theology; for example, the preference for Gerson is not only an indication of Luther's favour but also sub-textually suggests the propriety of Luther's thinking by aligning him with Gerson.²⁶⁶ This view was demonstrated earlier in Melanchthon's 1546 funeral oration for Luther, where Melanchthon identified his friend as the most recent figure

²⁶⁵ This model of ecclesiastical history as a process of decline from the Early Church onwards was seemingly common to both heterodox and orthodox groups from the fourth-century Donation of Constantine, or certainly the time following its incorporation into Gratian's twelfth-century *Decretum* until the Reformation; while this view appears to have been quite widely embraced, its origins have not been subjected to any in-depth study and it has largely been neglected by scholarship. See the introduction to this thesis, pp. 8-36.

²⁶⁶ Jean Gerson is credited with having played a major role at the Council of Constance (1414-1418) in bringing about a solution to the Great Schism, while also contributing to the condemnation of Hus. See John B. Morrall, *Gerson and the Great Schism* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. P., 1960), pp. 94-110.

in a long chain of prophets and witnesses to the true faith of the Church, safeguarding true doctrine and calling Her back to her ideals.²⁶⁷

It is through the successes as well as the failings of Luther's character, however, that the indirect aim of the text emerges, namely the championing of the humanist cause and its educational reforms. While much of the direct exposition of Luther's education takes place during the *Historia*'s treatment of his childhood, it is during his monastic period that the clearly positive effects of this are made obvious; in fact, the text's logic suggests that Luther would not have achieved his various theological breakthroughs were it not for the influence of humanist education as well as Luther's innate intelligence. This theme reaches its full articulation in the narrative dealing with Luther's life after 1517 which will be treated later in this thesis. At the same time, however, this indirect statement of the positive effects of humanism clashes with the various narrative techniques used by Melanchthon throughout the *Historia* to suggest divine favour and intervention in Luther's cause; if one interprets this negatively, Luther's theological breakthrough is either the consequence of humanism or the consequence of God's hand at work; alternatively, Melanchthon may be suggesting through his examination of Luther's monastic period and education that Luther did make his breakthrough as a consequence of both divine intervention as well as humanist education, which itself was divinely willed. Under such an interpretation, the witness to the values of humanist education represents, for Melanchthon at least, a return to a golden age both theologically and philosophically; its benefits are obvious in Luther's reformation breakthrough and his subsequent 'victory' in the logic of the text.

5. Characterization

The quality of characterization seen in the monastic period forms a further link between the text and the romantic *mythos*. The genre traditionally requires little development in terms of the subject's character and this is clearly seen in Melanchthon's Luther. This is not to say, however, that the *Historia*'s Luther is devoid of personality, but rather that the characteristics given him at birth do not fundamentally change. In the representation of the child Luther, for example, the

²⁶⁷ Philip Melanchthon, *Oratio uber der Leich des Ehrwirdigen herrn D. Martini Luthers* (Wittenberg: G. Rhaw, 1546), A4.

reader meets the classic trope of the *puer senex* and this characterization of the wise and holy child remains constant as the narrative progresses and Luther ages.²⁶⁸ This *topos* brings together the ideals of youth and wisdom gained by age, familiar from a range of classical sources.²⁶⁹ Melancthon's representation of Luther as being in possession of such mature intelligence also recalls several religious precedents, notably the depiction of the twelve year-old Christ teaching in the temple described in Luke 2. 41-50. This *topos* was further popularized throughout Western Christianity in Gregory the Great's *De vita et miraculis venerabilis Benedicti*, the opening words of which couple youth with a saintly intelligence.²⁷⁰ In the *Historia*, Luther's gifts, focussed primarily on his ability to learn, his rhetorical skills and indications of holiness, continue to be revealed throughout his development but are shown from the start as having attained an apotheosis:

Degustata igitur literarum dulcedine, natura flagrans cupiditate discendi, appetit Academiam, tanquam fontem omnium doctrinarum. Et omnes artes ordine percipere tanta vis ingenii potuisset, si Doctores idoneos invenisset, et fortassis ad leniendam vehemantiam naturae mitiora studia Philosophiae, et cura formandae orationis profuissent. (Avi^{v-r})

Even in the cloister, Luther's chief characteristics are piety and discipline, both echoed from the depiction of his childhood. Moreover, these talents are typical of those found in the subject of a humanist biography. The effect of this is to cast Luther from the start as a fully-formed character who undergoes little, if any, development; this characterization is generically true and recalls the hero of the romance.

Throughout the monastic period, Luther is continually described positively in the terms and values of the Renaissance humanist, familiar from the representation

²⁶⁸ See the depiction of Luther's childhood in the *Historia*, Aiiii^v-Avi^r.

²⁶⁹ Examples are to be found in Virgil, *Aeneid*, IX, ed. and trans. by S. J. Harrison (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 311, and Ovid among many others. In fact, Ovid identifies such precocious wisdom as a gift from heaven granted only to emperors and demigods; see Ovid, *Ars*, I (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), 185 f.

²⁷⁰ 'Fuit vir vitae venerabilis, gratia Benedictus et nomine, ab ipso suae pueritiae tempore cor gerens senile', in Grégoire le Grand, *Dialogues*, ed. by Adalbert de Vogüé and Paul Antin, Sources chrétiennes, 3 vols (Paris: Cerf, 1978-1980), II (260), Prologus, p. 124. This depiction went on to become a hagiographic cliché whose influence can be traced throughout the Middle Ages; see Robert Curtius, 'Boy and Old Man', in *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, Bollingen Series XXXVI (Princeton: Princeton Univ. P., 1953; 1990), pp. 98-101.

of Luther's childhood as well as the classics of humanism. This is seen, for example, in the description of Luther's theological studies, completed while in the monastery:

Non igitur paupertas, sed studium pietatis eum in illud viae monasticae genus induxit, in quo etsi doctrinam in scholis usitatam quotidie discebat, et Sententiariorum legebat, et in Disputationibus publicis labyrinthos aliis inextricabiles, diserte multis admirantibus explicabat, tamen quia in eo vitae genere non famam ingenii, sed alimenta pietatis quaerebat, haec studia tanquam parergatractabat, et facile arripiebat illas scholasticas methodos.
(Avii^r)

Melanchthon provides a background of scholasticism, and even though Luther is shown to progress through the scholastic system, he is here shown as a gifted teacher who gathers knowledge which he subsequently explains to others; importantly, however, he draws on inexplicable questions, 'labyrinthos aliis inextricabiles', which he tackles with eloquence, 'diserte', thereby gaining the wonder of the crowd. While there are obvious biblical undertones to this passage, it is the emphasis on the humanist skills that dominates,²⁷¹ with Luther almost personifying the five canons of classical rhetoric which conquer monkish sophistry,²⁷² and Melanchthon, thereby, highlights the antithesis between scholasticism and humanist education. Alongside the direct representation of Luther's humanist skills, Melanchthon's subject also displays the independent critique of scholasticism that might be expected in a humanist hero:

²⁷¹ Compare, for example, one early fifteenth-century humanist tract on education: Ante omnia igitur, si quid proficere de doctrinis volumus, congrui sermonis habenda est ratio et curandam ne, dum maiora prosequimur, turpiter in minoribus labi videamur. Proxime huic disputandi ratio abhibenda est, per quam in unaquaque re, quid verum falsumve sit, facile argumentando quaerimas. Ea, cum sit discendi scientia sciendique disciplina, ad omne doctrinam genus viam facile aperit. Rhetorica vero tertia est inter rationes disciplinas, per quam artificiosa quaeritur eloquentia, quam et tertiam posuimus inter praecipuas civilitatis partes. Verum ea, cum nobilium hominum studiis celebrari olim conuevisset, nunc paene prorsus obsolevit. Taken from Pier Paolo Vergerio, *Ad ubertinum de carraria de ingenuis moribus et liberalibus adolescentiae studiis liber*, in *Humanist Educational Treatises*, ed. and trans. by Craig W. Kallendorf, The I Tatti Renaissance Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. P., 2002), p. 50.

²⁷² See Cicero, *De inventione*, trans. by H.M. Hubbell (Oxford: Loeb, 1949), I, 7; Cicero, *De oratore*, 2 vols, trans. by E. W. Sutton and H. Rackham (Oxford: Loeb, 1942), I, 31-142; and Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, trans. by H. E. Butler. (Oxford: Loeb, 1920-22), 3. 3.

De quo, cum multorum expositiones legisset, tunc et ex huius sermonibus, et suae mentis consolatione animadvertisse, interpretaationum, quae tunc in manibus erant, vanitatem. Paulatim legenti et conferenti dicta et exempla in Prophetis et Apostolis recitata, et in quotidiana invocatione excitanti fidem, plus lucis accessit. Tunc et Augustini libros legere coepit, ubi et in Psalmorum enarratione, et in libro de Spiritu et litera, multas perspicuas sententias reperit, quae confirmabant hanc de fide doctrinam, et consolationem, quae in ipsius pectore accensa erat. Nec tamen prorsus reliquit Sententiariorum, Gabrielem et Cammeracensem paene ad verbum memoriter recitare poterat. (Aviii^{v-r})

Importantly, Luther follows the method and curriculum prescribed by scholasticism but arrives at his own understanding that the standard interpretation is empty, ‘vanitatem’. Luther’s independent and critical understanding leads him, however, to illumination, ‘plus lucis accessit’. Luther’s understanding continues to grow as a consequence of humanist practices, namely ‘memoria’ or the discipline of recalling arguments. The humanist skills are identified again later in the *Historia* as justification for Frederick the Wise’s sponsorship of Luther’s doctorate (Aviii^r). The description of Luther’s first theological writings, also completed while still a monk, are equally reminiscent of humanist writings and are thus shown to be a product of such an education:

Postea enarrare Epistolam Ad Romanos coepit, deinde Psalmos, haec scripta sic illustravit, ut post longam et obscuram noctem, nova doctrinae lux oriri videretur, omnium piorum et prudentum iudicio. Hic monstravit Legis et Evangelii discrimen, hic refutavit errorem, qui tunc in Scholis et concionibus regnabat, qui docet, mereri homines remissionem peccatorum propriis operibus, et homines coram Deo iustos esse disciplina, ut Pharisei docuerunt. (B^v)

It is Melancthon’s use of the imagery of illumination, ‘illustravit’ and ‘post longam et obscuram noctem’, that suggests not only humanism but also biblical precedents, thereby connecting Luther’s acts and humanism to divine favour. Through this highly positive valorization of Luther’s acts both in the cloister and in the period

leading to the posting of the Ninety-Five Theses, Luther's actions are seen as divinely favoured. Melanchthon's approval of Luther is obviously great and the various hagiographical and biblical tropes,²⁷³ especially strong in the representation of his childhood, identify Luther as a saint or at least quasi-divine figure here in his early adulthood. One example of this is seen in the description of Luther sustaining himself on only a little food, and then only herring, 'halece' (Avii^v), a standard food of saints in the hagiographical tradition, as well as the divine messenger seen in the form of the 'old man' in the Erfurt cloister, again a standard trope of the hagiographical tradition. His reformation redeems the Church and returns Her to Her lost ideals, thereby redeeming society:

Ach!, Obiit Auriga & currus Israel, qui rexit Ecclesiam in hac ultima senecta mundi: Neque enim humana sagacitate depraehensa est doctrina de Remissione peccatorum, & de fiducia Filli Dei, Se a Deo per hunc virum patefacta, Quem etiam a Deo excitatum vidimus fuisse. (Eii^r)

Through this interpretation of Luther's life as a progressive path leading to its central episode of the Ninety-Five Theses, Luther becomes a messianic figure who is incarnated at the Reformation and who continues his ministry thereafter. While this preparatory narrative suggests a gospel comparison, both in terms of narrative structure as well as Luther's age, the lack of a crucifixion episode in the narrative prevents any close affinities with Christ and maintains Luther's status as the latest prophet of the Church calling for a return to Her ideals. This concentration on the posting of the Ninety-Five Theses forms the *anagnorisis* of the narrative and represents Luther's reincarnation as the reformer Luther who reaches here his own completion; thereafter Luther remains static both physically in the narrative and geographically in Wittenberg. Throughout the narrative prior to this, Luther shifts geographically from university to cloister, from cloister to cloister and then to university; at each stage, he is shown to have outgrown his *locus* intellectually, requiring a move to a place more suitable for the next stage of his path. These moves

²⁷³ For an example of the 'old man' as divine messenger, see the figure of Romanus in the *Life of St Benedict*. Romanus provides Benedict with clothing, food and shelter as the latter begins his life as a hermit; see Grégoire le Grand, *Dialogues*, II.

form the *basanoi* of the romance, and it is significant that such moves cease following the Ninety-Five Theses and the Diet of Worms.

While some form of reward might be expected as recompense for the quest, Luther has clearly enjoyed divine favour for some time in his life according to Melanchthon's narrative, and the reward, therefore, is not divine favour. Equally, while Luther later acquires a bride, nor is she the reward; however, one might see in her liberation from the convent, her escape from a forbidden location. Indeed, the absence of Luther's wife, Katherina von Bora, from the narrative may be ascribed to the fact that it did not belong thematically to Melanchthon's narrative agenda, namely a justification of Luther's theology and humanist education. However, the question of Luther's marriage is potentially an embarrassing question that would require narrative explanation, especially regarding Luther's breach of his monastic vows, and that Melanchthon would prefer to avoid. Its exclusion might also be explained by the shift from a linear, chronological narrative to the characterological treatment that follows the positing of the Ninety-Five Theses. The reader must assume, therefore, that the reward sought and gained by Luther is the acquisition of the true Church that follows Luther's stand against Rome and the subsequent schism.

6. Narrative Structure

While the *Historia*'s full title suggests a comprehensive treatment of his life, the representation of Luther's biography is in fact partial and limited in its focus. The narrative focuses on Luther's education and development only in so far as it is important to his development as a reformer and theologian, a fact reflected in the organisation of the text. In the representation of Luther's life from birth until 1517, the text pursues a clear chronological structure that provides a continual pattern of Luther outgrowing the various stages of his life; this image of growth or outgrowth is seen throughout the depiction of his childhood and his monastic period, where his various intellectual advances are seen in geographical moves, suggesting that Luther must move if he is to progress intellectually as well as physically. This is most clearly seen in the description of Luther progressing to his doctorate which sees his move from Wittenberg to Rome, to Wittenberg and finally his doctorate:

Eo autem tempore, quia Reverendus vir Stupicius, qui exordia Academiae Vuittebergensis adiuverat, studium Theologicum in recenti Academia excitare cupiebat, cum ingenium et eruditionem Lutheri confiderasset, traducit eum Vuittebergam, Anno 1508 cum iam ageret annum vicesimum sextum. Hic inter quotidiana exercitia Scholae et concionum, magis etiam lucere eius ingenium coepit. Cumque eum attente audirent viri sapientes, Doctor Martinus Mellerstadius et alii, saepe dixit Mellerstadius, tantam esse vim ingenii in hoc viro, ut plane praesagiret mutaturum esse vulgare doctrinae genus, quod tunc in Scholis unicum tradebatur. Hic primum Dialecticen et Physicen Aristotilis enarravit, Interea tamen suum illud studium legendi scripta Theologica non omittens. Post triennium Romam profectus, propter Monachorum controversias, cum eodem anno reversus esset, usitato more scholarum, Duce Saxoniae Electore Friderico praebente sumptus, ornatus est gradu Doctorum, ut usitate loquimur. (Aviii^r-B^v)

The effect of this again suggests that the experiences Luther had in Rome and Wittenberg are connected to his educational progress; importantly, however, Melancthon does not develop Luther's experiences in Rome as an important theological turning-point. The significance of the journey to Rome for Luther's attitude to the Roman Church, and specifically its abuses, has been regarded as an important experience in Luther's development which opened his eyes to abuses of privilege by the clergy.²⁷⁴ While Luther's references to his time there only date after 1531, there is no reason to assume that he had not formulated these thoughts prior to this point in time.²⁷⁵ The allusions to the romance genre are clear as well as allowing

²⁷⁴ Luther has left a legacy of acerbic statements on his visit to Rome; the following exemplify his sharp observations: one famous indictment has Luther arrive in Rome with onions but depart with garlic, in *WA*, 47, 392, 10f; similarly, Luther makes his regret clear at not being able to say Mass at St John Lateran owing to the queue, in *WA*, 31, I, 226, 11-17; 1530. In another claim, Luther reports climbing the *Santa Scala* in an attempt to free his grandfather from Purgatory but on reaching the top is overcome by scepticism, in *WA* 51.89, 20-23; 1545; the various abuses and blasphemies witnessed by Luther in Rome led him to see the Devil's presence in the city, cited in *WA Tr*, 4, no. 5010; 612, 11; 1540 and *WA Tr*, 6, no. 6777; 183, 3 f. Later in life, Luther described his shock on hearing so many blasphemies uttered in public as well as the mockery of the saints alongside priests joking about the Eucharist; see *WA* 38.212, 3f and 4f; Luther summarises his experiences in Rome as the cause of pain and an identification of the city's inhabitants as the worst Christians, in *WA Tr*, 3, no. 3248; 313 5f.

²⁷⁵ See, for example, the discussion of the journey in Russel Lemmons, "If there is a hell, then Rome stands upon it": Martin Luther as Traveler and Translator', in *Travel and Translation in the Early Modern Period*, ed. by Carmine G. Di Biase (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 33-45. While Boehmer

the narrative to focus on Luther's educational development, seen especially in terms of Humanism and its benefits. This accumulation of skills is, of course, witnessed through chronology and the adoption of a Suetonian approach to biography. This approach, based on movement, also has the effect of maintaining pace until the narrative reaches its crux in the depiction of the Indulgences controversy.

Thereafter, the structural organisation of the narrative differs and Melanchthon abandons the chronological for a characterlogical approach. As the turning-point in the narrative, 1517 and the Ninety-Five Theses assume a vital significance structurally that reflects Melanchthon's interpretation of Luther's life and work, even though Luther attached greater significance to his post-Reformation writings. Melanchthon grants this event greater significance and emplots it at the heart of the narrative as the start of the Reformation.

In turn, the humanism-inspired education acquired by Luther, as demonstrated in the depiction of childhood and the monastic period in the *Historia*, enables theological truth to be recovered as if from hiding. This fact is supported through the repetition of both phrases and imagery from the description of Luther's birth, education in his childhood, at university and in the monastery, in the depiction of the revelation of gospel truths:

Postea enarrare Epistolam Ad Romanos coepit, deinde Psalmos, haec scripta sic illustravit, ut post longam et obscuram noctem, nova doctrinae lux oriri videretur, omnium piorum et prudentum iudicio. Hic monstravit Legis et Evangelii discrimen, hic refutavit errorem, qui tunc in Scholis et concionibus regnabat, qui docet, mereri homines remissionem peccatorum propriis operibus, et homines coram Deo iustos esse disciplina, ut Pharisei docuerunt... Huius doctrinae dulcedine pii omnes valde capiebantur, Et eruditis gratum erat, quasi ex tenebris, carcere, squalore educi Christum, Prophetas, Apostolos, conspici discrimen Legis, et Evangelii, promissionum Legis, et promissionis Evangelicae, Philosophiae et Evangelii, quod certe non extabat in Thoma, Scoto et similibus, Iustitiae spiritualis et rerum politicarum. (B^v-Bi^v)

offers a detailed account of Luther's experiences in Rome, he only devotes two pages to its effects on Luther as a theologian; see Heinrich Böhmer, *Luthers Romfahrt* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1914).

Once again, the emphasis on illumination, ‘post longam et obscuram noctem’, ‘lux oriri’, after the darkness of ‘orthodox’ Catholic teaching stresses the return to a ‘true’ understanding, reinforced through the notion of theology being led out of darkness and captivity, ‘ex tenebris, carcere, squalore’. Importantly, it is the sweetness of this new doctrine, ‘doctrinae dulcedine’ that convinces the pious of Luther’s argument, and again it is in humanist terms and language that Luther triumphs.²⁷⁶ Given the inherently hagiographical nature of the depiction of Luther’s childhood and early adulthood, Luther’s acquisition of truth is shown to be a divine process with gospel affinities but, importantly, one that is facilitated in humanist terms. Having reached this status, Luther’s life shifts to look at his acts during his ministry. This culminates in a quasi-passion narrative from which Luther is resurrected into a new religion as the reformer Luther. Critically, Luther’s trials are shown to be intellectual and in which he triumphs because of the skills provided him by his humanist training.

Following the Ninety-Five Theses, the narrative adopts a characterological structure, reminiscent of Plutarchan biography. Having used chronology until 1517, the characterological approach enables Melanchthon to focus on the Diet of Worms in detail, thereby giving voice to Luther and allowing his hero to defend the Reformation in person; this new approach enables Melanchthon to display Luther’s timeless theological effects and to present these as the culmination of the preparation of Luther seen in the childhood and the monastic period.

The narrative structure of the monastic period must, therefore, be seen within the wider context of Luther’s biography as provided by the *Historia*. His monastic period forms the culmination of Luther’s preparation for his Reformation acts as well as witnessing the closing *basanoi* of his linear progression to Reform; crucially, Luther’s trials are shown to be intellectual ones in which he triumphs because of the skills provided him by his humanist training. Having documented that this progress is made possible through and as a result of humanism, Melanchthon shifts his narrative to examine Luther in debate at the Diet of Worms, where the previously described skills of rhetoric and eloquence will be shown mimetically at work.

²⁷⁶ Compare the terms of another fifteenth-century humanist educational treatise: ‘Nam sicut pulsante optimo citharoedo magis delectatur qui eius artis cognitionem aliquam attingit quam qui ignorat, ita et in poetarum lectione maiore suavitate afficitur’, in Baptista Guarinus, *Ad Maffaeum Gambaram Brixianum adolescentem generosum discipulum suum, De ordine docendi et studendi*, in Kallendorf, *Humanist Educational Treaties*, p. 24.

7. 'Absent' Episodes

As one of the earliest and fullest treatments of Luther's life, Melanchthon's account of the monastic period does pose questions as to the origins of several episodes which have been accorded greater significance in later biographies but which are virtually ignored in the *Historia*. This is most obviously seen in the episodes in the depiction of the monastic period; first, in the episode dealing with Luther's vow to become a monk:

Sed brevi post, cum natus esset annum unum et vicesimum, subito praeter parentum et propinquorum opinionem, venit ad Collegium Monachorum Augustinianorum Erphordiae, seque recipi petit. (Avi^r-Avii^v)

This representation is devoid of any of the elements of the quasi-divine legend that surrounds the Stotternheim episode that were later adopted by other Protestant biographers.²⁷⁷ Melanchthon's depiction of Luther's motivation to become a monk is seen as the outcome of his natural qualities and education, both of which render him perfectly qualified for his a monastic vocation and later career as biblical exegete; this naturally imposes a tolerance for monasticism which casts it as a normal act for young men of Luther's abilities and character. Here, Luther's childhood talents indicate his suitability for a monastic life, and these same talents seen in Luther's early adulthood confirm their saintly quality in the child. This characterization is commensurate with hagiographical portrayals of saints whose characters are determined at birth and which remain static throughout life.²⁷⁸ By casting Luther's

²⁷⁷ The ultimate model for this narrative episode is of course St Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts 9. 34) which was acknowledged by Luther's friend Crotus Rubianus as well as Luther's novice master, Johannes Nathin. This biblical trope later became common to hagiographical writings, finding expression in many saints' lives; see for example John Capgrave's account of St Norbert's conversion in *Vita Sancti Norberti*, ed. and trans. by Cyril Lawrence Smetana, Studies and Texts (Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies), 40 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1977). In terms of the *Lutherbild*, see the depiction given in Mathesius in which the Stotternheim vow acquires a fuller articulation that suggests a sudden and God-motivated act, Johannes Mathesius, *Historien von des Ehrwürdigen in Gott Seligen thewren Manns Gottes Doctoris Martini Luthers anfang, lehr, leben vnd sterben* (Nürnberg, 1566), in *Johannes Mathesius: Ausgewählte Werke*, III, ed. G. Loesche (Prag: Calwe, 1906), p. 20. For a recent discussion of the vow, see also Hans Puchta, 'Luthers Stotternheimer Gelübde: Versuch einer Deutung', *ARG* 84 (1993), 311-318.

²⁷⁸ See, for example, the life of Saint Nicholas, in Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda aurea*, 7 vols (Dresden; Leipzig: Arnold, 1846), II, pp. 49-55.

decision as a neutral and almost everyday act, Melanchthon largely removes the singulative nature of the act and the vow's only remarkable feature is its sudden nature, indicated by 'subito'; for Melanchthon, the act is bereft of any divine influence, enabling him to avoid the question of Luther breaking a divine commandment as well as his monastic vows later in life. Furthermore, the underplayed significance of this event continues the steady path to the monastery that Melanchthon's narrative has depicted in Luther's education and character from his childhood onwards.

The second episode that is almost ignored in the *Historia* is the account of the death of one of Luther's friends:

Hos terrores seu primum, seu acerrimos sensit eo anno, cum sodalem,
nescioquo casu interfectum, amisisset. (Avii^v)

While this episode is found in many narratives of Luther's monastic period,²⁷⁹ its emplotment at this stage in the narrative is significant and occurs somewhat later than is commonly accepted. The death of one of Luther's friends is typically regarded as being one of a series of events that motivated Luther's decision to enter the monastery, thereby negating the absolute importance of the Stotternheim vow legend as the only factor in Luther's decision. As such, the death typically occurs before Luther's admission to the Erfurt cloister; in the *Historia*, however, the death is placed in direct connection with Luther's *terrores* and cast as their catalyst. Having suggested, therefore, that Luther's decision to become a monk was perfectly natural and by removing other influences, Melanchthon structurally retains the singulative significance of the Stotternheim vow through its isolation as the only factor in Luther's motivation to become a monk and by disconnecting chronologically other episodes that might have played a role in this decision. Melanchthon's contribution to the *Lutherbild* does not tally with later depictions.

Melanchthon's depiction of Luther's journey to Rome in 1510/11 is treated similarly in a neutral narrative that lacks any comment on the significance of the event:

²⁷⁹ See, for example, Manns, p. 22.

Hic primum Dialecticen et Physicen Aristotilis enarravit, Interea tamen suum illud studium legendi scripta Theologica non omittens. Post triennium Romam profectus, propter Monachorum controversias, cum eodem anno reversus esset, usitato more scholarum, Duce Saxoniae Electore Friderico praebente sumptus, ornatus est gradu Doctorum, ut usitate loquimur. (Aviii^r-B^v)

Given that this episode also acquires the status of an important turning-point in Luther's religious life and understanding of the Church,²⁸⁰ at which Luther realises the errors of the institution and Her clergy, this depiction is curious. Once again, Melanchthon underplays the significance of the episode and provides no statement as to its effect on Luther. Yet its position in the narrative of Luther's monastic period is significant, placed amidst a discussion of Luther's theological studies and writings. By not endowing the journey with any great importance in Luther's thinking or outward acts, Melanchthon concentrates on Luther's theological and intellectual life. This has the effect of asserting the intellectual and theological nature of Luther's Reformation and brushes aside any notion of Luther simply reacting negatively to extremes and abuses of Roman life, both in and outside the Vatican.²⁸¹ This interpretation strengthens the notion of Luther's gradual awakening to religious truth throughout his education and concentrated in the person of the old man in the Erfurt cloister, who functions as a divine messenger and bears the message of *sola fide* to Luther.²⁸²

²⁸⁰ The classic Protestant account of Luther's life sees the journey to Rome as a pivotal moment at which Luther's eyes were opened to the corruption of the Roman Church and its clergy; this view has been passed on from the sixteenth century onwards and is found in many subsequent accounts; see for example the journey's depiction in Julius Köstlin, *Luthers Leben* (Leipzig: Reissland, 1892), pp. 66-70. A more recent example is found in Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: The Man between God and the Devil* (New York: Yale Univ. P., 1990), pp. 146-150.

²⁸¹ The Vatican, Rome and the licentious behaviour of some of the curia had long been the focus of criticism before Luther's visit and would, therefore, have been an easy target for a young priest with a pious and earnest disposition. For a description of Rome in this period, see Peter Partner, *Renaissance Rome: 1500-1599: A Portrait of a Society* (Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California P., 1976).

²⁸² Et senis cuiusdam sermonibus in Augustiniano Collegio Erphordiae saepe se confirmatum esse narrabat, cui cum consternationes suas exponeret, audivit eum de fide multa disserentem, seque deductum aiebat ad Symbolum, in quo dicitur, Credo remissionem peccatorum. Hunc Articulum sic ille interpretaetus erat non solum in genere credendum esse, aliquibus remitti, ut et Daemones credunt, Davidi aut Petro remitti, Sed mandatum Dei esse, ut singuli homines remitti nobis peccata credamus. (Avii^r)

8. Education in the Monastic Period

The overall stress of Luther's depiction in the monastic period is the same as that in his childhood; that is to say that Melanchthon places in the foreground Luther's education and the benefits it grants him. Melanchthon gives credit to the rôle played by Augustine in Luther's theological thinking, and acknowledges Luther's scholastic training, albeit it with intentional preferences:

Paulatim legenti et conferenti dicta et exempla in Prophetis et Apostolis recitata, et in quotidiana invocatione excitanti fidem, plus lucis accessit. Tunc et Augustini libros legere coepit, ubi et in Psalmorum enarratione, et in libro de Spiritu et litera, multas perspicuas sententias reperit, quae confirmabant hanc de fide doctrinam, et consolationem, quae in ipsius pectore accensa erat. Nec tamen prorsus reliquit Sententiariorum, Gabrielem et Cammeracensem paene ad verbum memoriter recitare poterat. Diu multumque legit scripta Occam, huius acumen anteferebat Thomae et Scoto. Diligenter et Gersonem legerat, Sed omnia Augustini monumenta et saepe legerat, et optime meminerat. (Aviii^v)

By describing the education in this way, the narrative presents Luther's gradual recovery of truth of justification with specific details of teachers and authors in a way found in biographies of other humanists.²⁸³ In Melanchthon's narrative structure, it is significant that Luther only comes to biblical study after philological work, itself enabled by humanist education, has been carried out.

Melanchthon's characterization of Luther in this period is one which stresses his educational ability and progress, drawing on the same vocabulary as used in the description of Luther's schooling. Luther is thus presented as a static figure who overcomes all obstacles with which he is presented and whose dominant characteristic is his wisdom; there is a certain tension in this portrayal given that while his intelligence is the object of wonder at each stage of his life, and therefore

²⁸³ See James Michael Weiss, 'Erasmus at Luther's Funeral: Melanchthon's Commemorations of Luther in 1546', *Sixteenth-Century Journal*, 16.1 (Spring, 1985), 91-114 (p. 99).

something more than normal, he is simultaneously not shown to advance but merely to rise to challenge when necessary:

Eo autem tempore, quia Reverendus vir Stupicius, qui exordia Academiae Vuittebergensis adiuverat, studium Theologicum in recenti Academia excitare cupiebat, cum ingenium et eruditionem Lutheri confiderasset, traducit eum Vuittebeagam, Anno 1508 cum iam ageret annum vicesimum sextum. Hic inter quotidiana exercitia Scholae et concionum, magis etiam lucere eius ingenium coepit. (Aviii^r)

While the representation of Luther's personality does not intrinsically develop throughout the depiction of his childhood or his time in the monastery, the *Historia* does present his progress through the various stages of his education. This progress is, of course, reflected in Luther's various geographical movements that suggest Luther's outgrowing of the curriculum on offer at each point in his life and this curriculum is naturally the medieval scholastic system much criticized by humanists.²⁸⁴ Once Luther's education, itself a mixture of scholasticism and humanism, is complete, he begins his serious theological studies. In this way, the narrative structure of the *Historia* shows that Luther's thinking was made logically possible by his education. Within this context, it is significant that Mellerstadt's prophecy of Luther is that he will reform learning and education:

Cumque eum attente audirent viri sapientes, Doctor Martinus Mellerstadius et alii, saepe dixit Mellerstadius, tantam esse vim ingenii in hoc viro, ut plane praesagiret mutaturum esse vulgare doctrinae genus, quod tunc in Scholis unicum tradebatur. (Avii^r)

Melanchthon is, of course, writing with the gift of hindsight, and while acknowledging Mellerstadt's prophecy,²⁸⁵ he is suggesting here that the process

²⁸⁴ Classic examples of such criticism are to be found in Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum* (Strasbourg [?]: E. Zetzner [?], 1622), Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Conclusiones Nongentae Disputandae* (1486), or François Rabelais, *Gargantua*, ed. by Ruth Calder and M.A. Screech (Geneva: Droz, 1970), pp. 130-143.

²⁸⁵ Martin Polich von Mellerstadt was the first rector of the University of Wittenberg, having moved from Leipzig where he had been at the centre of a humanist group, 'Sodalitas Polychiana'. For further

necessary for Luther to reach his ‘correct’ understanding of theology required a humanism-inspired education which in turn requires all those teaching that ‘truth’ to undergo a similar system, thereby fulfilling Mellerstadt’s original prophecy.²⁸⁶

In this context, it is significant that Luther’s first work is a commentary on Aristotle’s *Dialectic and Physics*; once again, Melanchthon stresses here both Luther’s inheritance from and relationship to the primary concerns of the humanist movement, both in the author of Luther’s first writings as well as its contents. Having established Luther’s talents in his youth, Melanchthon repeats them in the monastic period, using the same terms as before, which are familiar from Humanist educational treatises.²⁸⁷ This is seen, for example, in the depiction of Frederick the Wise’s recognition of Luther’s abilities and sponsorship of Luther’s doctorate:

Post triennium Romam profectus, propter Monachorum controversias, cum eodem anno reversus esset, usitato more scholarum, Duce Saxoniae Electore Friderico praebente sumptus, ornatus est gradu Doctorum, ut usitate loquimur. Audierat enim concionantem, et vim ingenii, et nervos orationis, ac rerum bonitatem expositarum in concionibus, admiratus fuerat. Et ut quadam quasi maturitate iudicii videas gradum ei Doctorum attributum esse, scias fuisse eum annum aetatis Lutheri tricesimum. (B^v)

It is only at this stage, following philological and humanist studies, that Luther begins his study of the Bible in earnest; therefore, Melanchthon casts Luther’s biblical study as a successor to his humanist training, thereby asserting the primary significance of the latter. It is also at this point, following Luther’s doctorate that his ‘true’ Reformation work begins, recalling Christ’s ministry in his thirtieth year.

In the *Historia*, Melanchthon establishes a language to describe both Luther’s education as well as his theological writings throughout the depiction of Luther’s

information, see Maria Grossmann, *Humanism in Wittenberg 1485-1517*, Bibliotheca humanistica & reformatonica, 11 (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1975), p. 46, and Sachiko Kusukawa, *The Transformation of Natural Philosophy: The Case of Philip Melanchthon* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), pp. 21-25.

²⁸⁶ As Weiss indicates, Melanchthon draws here on another technique common to humanist biographies, namely the prediction of future greatness. Melanchthon uses the same *topos* in his life of Erasmus, ‘*Oratio de Erasmo Roterodamo*’, CR, XII, pp. 265-71, while it is also present in a life of Conrad Celtis, see Joseph Ashbach, *Die früheren Wanderjahre des Conrad Celtis* (Vienna: K.K. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1869), pp. 137-41.

²⁸⁷ See, for example, Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, ‘*De liberorum educatione*’, in *Humanist Educational Treaties*, p. 170 and p. 178.

childhood and early adulthood. This language has, in part, biblical undertones and connects with the intention to suggest that Luther's writings had an illuminating effect:

Postea enarrare Epistolam Ad Romanos coepit, deinde Psalmos, haec scripta sic illustravit, ut post longam et obscuram noctem, nova doctrinae lux oriri videretur, omnium piorum et prudentum iudicio. Hic monstravit Legis et Evangelii discrimen, hic refutavit errorem, qui tunc in Scholis et concionibus regnabat, qui docet, mereri homines remissionem peccatorum propriis operibus, et homines coram Deo iustos esse disciplina, ut Pharisei docuerunt. (B^v)

This metaphor also connects with the concept of the Church's decline, discussed earlier, in that the Church is now returning to an earlier and preferable state. At the same time, the imagery is reminiscent of humanist writings and the rediscovery of classical literature,²⁸⁸ and in fact had been a stock humanist trope since the first biographies of Petrarch.²⁸⁹ Importantly, Luther is seen to teach all pious and prudent men, 'omnium piorum et prudentum', again suggestive of a Christian humanist audience. In this way, Luther's theological teachings are cast in terms normal for the humanists' recovery of eloquence.

Throughout the monastic period, Melancthon has cast Luther's advancing education in terms of Gospel revelation as well as the humanist rediscovery. By doing this, Luther's theological re-discovery, based on Augustine as Melancthon shows,²⁹⁰ is cast in the same language and metaphors that are intra- and extra-diagetically allied to a narrative of humanist conversion, that is to say both in the *Historia* itself and externally linked to other Renaissance humanist treatises. This suggests the earlier claim of Luther's inheritance and the necessity of humanist endeavours to the Lutheran Reformation, again presenting the humanist cause. The

²⁸⁸ In the preface to the *Erasmi omnia opera* (1540), Beatus Rhenanus describes the benefits of Erasmus's linguistic works in a similar way. The Latin text is reproduced in P.S. Allen, *Opus epistolarum des Erasmi Roteridami*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon P., 1906), pp. 56-71 (p. 66).

²⁸⁹ See Angelo Solerti, ed., *Le prime Vite di Dante, Petrarca, e Boccaccio* (Milan: Vallardi, 1904) and C. A. Madrignani, 'Di alcune biografie umanistiche di Dante e Petrarca', *Belfagor*, 18 (1963), 29-48.

²⁹⁰ Tunc et Augustini libros legere coepit, ubi et in Psalmorum enarratione, et in libro de Spiritu et litera, multas perspicuas sententias reperit, quae confirmabant hanc de fide doctrinam, et consolationem, quae in ipsius pectore accensa erat. (*Historia*, Avii')

eloquence identified earlier in Luther by his teacher, fellow students, Frederick the Wise, is of course a skill much praised by humanists,²⁹¹ this skill again arises, but this time allows Luther to win over others to his cause. Here again, the language of religious and humanist conversion merge as Luther leads the captive Christian to the freedom of the Gospel:

Huius doctrinae dulcedine pii omnes valde capiebantur, Et eruditis gratum erat, quasi ex tenebris, carcere, squalore educi Christum, Prophetas, Apostolos, conspici discrimen Legis, et Evangelii, promissionum Legis, et promissionis Evangelicae, Philosophiae et Evangelii, quod certe non extabat in Thoma, Scoto et similibus, Iustitiae spiritualis et rerum politicarum. (Bi^v)

Therefore, in a way commensurate with the depiction of Luther in his childhood, Melanchthon uses the monastic period of Luther's life to promote the humanist educational cause. If the reader were in any doubt, Melanchthon reasserts his case just before the Indulgences controversy by describing Luther's study of biblical languages:

Accedebat huc, quod Erasmi scriptis iam invitata erant iuventutis studia ad Latinae et Graecae linguae cognitionem, Quare monstrato iam dulciore doctrinae genere, multi bonis et liberis ingeniis praediti, abhorrere a barbarica et Sophistica doctrina Monachorum incipiebant. Ipse etiam Lutherus Graecae et Hebraicae linguae studiis se dedere coepit, ut cognita sermonis proprietate et phrasi, et hausta ex fontibus doctrina, dexterius iudicare posset. (Bi^v)

This emplotment is again anachronistic as Luther most probably began such studies much earlier, probably in Erfurt under Johannes Lang, but by placing such studies directly before the Ninety-Five Theses, Melanchthon suggests that they were vital to the theological writings produced by Luther; while this was probably the case, the anachronistic emplotment makes this connection all the clearer. This message, ultimately championing the humanist cry of *ad fontes*, is reinforced through the introduction of Erasmus as Luther's guide in humanist, philological studies. By

²⁹¹ See p. 116, note 269 and p. 117, note 271.

casting Luther as the successor to Erasmus's work, this subtle connection again stresses the fundamental importance of humanist endeavours to Luther's theological thinking and reforms.

Throughout the depiction of the monastic period in the *Historia*, Melanchthon has developed an understanding of Luther's education and growth in humanist terms; Luther is cast as the product of a humanism-inspired system, and his obvious talents are those which humanism aims to develop. Luther's contributions to theology are shown to be the result of this training without which, the reader must assume, none would have been possible. The culmination of such preparation is of course the posting of the Ninety-Five Theses and Luther's clash with Rome which Melanchthon emplots as the pivotal point in his narrative and Luther's life, anticipated and prepared for in Luther's background.²⁹² The representation of the monastic period maintains and asserts, therefore, the primary significance of Humanism and Humanist studies to the Reformation; these studies enable Luther to re-discover the 'original' meaning of Scripture and return the Church, as a result of that knowledge and its very specific skills, to Her 'ideal' and 'original' state.

9. Concluding Remarks

The representation of Luther in the monastic period maintains the depiction of the reformer found in the narrative of his childhood, namely in the terms and images conventional to the humanists' discovery of literary and scholarly vocations.

Luther's talents continue to emerge as those of the humanist while his characterization retains the static quality associated with hagiography. Luther's years in the monastery importantly represent the period in which he completed several important theological advances towards reformation; by having developed an idiom that is externally familiar from humanist writing and internally tied to Luther's intellectual conversion first to the classics and only then to theology, Melanchthon

²⁹² Interestingly, Luther's work on Romans is traditionally seen as the beginning of his Reformation work, which in turn has been reduced narratively to his 'breakthrough' in the Wittenberg cloister tower. See, for example, a classic account in Gordon Rupp, 'The Righteousness of God', in *The Righteousness of God: Luther Studies* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1968), pp. 121-137. See also William R. Estep, *Renaissance and Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), pp. 115-116. For a discussion of the significance of Romans to Luther's theology, see Deanna A. Thompson, 'Letting the Word Run Free: Luther, Romans, and the Call to Reform', in *Reformation Readings of Romans*, ed. by Kathy Ehrensperger and R. Ward Holter, Romans through History and Culture Series (London: T. & T. Clark, 2008), pp. 25-37.

asserts the primary importance that humanism has and its rôle in the development of the Reformation. Luther's theological writings and teaching are cast in terms that are normal for the humanists' recovery of eloquence. In this way, humanist pursuits are presented as the culmination of Luther's studies that give him access to the 'truth', and which the pious Christian reader must assume to be essential.

The structural organisation of the monastic period in the *Historia* reflects the overall interpretative aim; whether this effect was intended or not at the point of writing the text, episodes have been emplotted in such a way that draw on the hallmarks of the romance myth so as to support the understanding of Luther's life and achievements. This is achieved through the use of a chronological narrative which Melanchthon subsequently abandons in order to economize on narrative. Melanchthon's *Historia* demonstrates the flexibility of the biographical genre; drawing on classical models, Melanchthon uses the linear trajectory of chronicle when it suits his purpose and uses this to describe Luther's progress through education from birth, through school and university education, to the monastery and finally the posting of the Ninety-Five Theses. Having used this cradle-to-grave narrative, Melanchthon then abandons it in preference to a characterological, non-linear narrative when he sees this as more appropriate and when such a structure will enable him to deal more effectively with only a few aspects of Luther's life. This structural change enables Melanchthon to avoid complex issues in Luther's later life and theological thinking by the use of summary judgements and narrative statements. A comparison with the narrative emplotment of other Reformation figures indicates the shared understanding of Reformation history as a difficult process but one which would lead to the (re-)introduction of the just society hoped for by both the authors and the subjects of such histories.²⁹³

²⁹³ See Backus's concluding remarks in *Life Writing*, p. 229-233.

Chapter Five:

The Ninety-Five Theses



Chronology requires a start date, and for the last five hundred years the history of the Reformation has typically been charted from Martin Luther's posting of the ninety-five theses in 1517. Although the event's historicity is disputed and it is largely immaterial to an understanding of the Reformation's theological and historical development, the posting of the Ninety-Five Theses remains a key episode in Luther's story, seemingly central to an understanding of his life and contribution. Melanchthon's 1546 *Historia* is one of the earliest biographies of Luther and the origin of the standard narrative of the posting of the Theses. As such, it is surprising that it has escaped close analysis in terms of how it depicts this famous event and its legacy to the *Lutherbild*. This study will explore Melanchthon's treatment of the *Thesenanschlag* with particular reference to how this schismatic and heretical act was narratively understood, and thereby reveal more of Melanchthon's own interpretation of the episode.

1. Introduction

[Martin Luther] was acting as Professor of Theology at Wittenberg University when a notorious hawker of indulgences visited the town in the course of a sort of sales-tour. Luther drew up ninety-five theses [...] to prove that the sale was a cruel hoax, and published this protest by nailing it to the door of the church. This was not in itself a very startling thing to do – discussions on such subjects were common among theologians. But Luther's action came at a critical time... Some looked on Luther as a hero, others as a heretic; and in the heated arguments that followed he found himself driven to deny the authority of the Pope and the sanctity of the clergy.²⁹⁴

While such an account of the origins of the Reformation is highly simplistic, it has much in common with serious, scholarly literature on the topic once the reader is beyond its emotive language;²⁹⁵ it emplots the posting of the ninety-five theses as not only the central act that sparked the beginning of the Reformation, but also casts that episode as an involuntarily action that *drove* Luther into the controversy with Rome that would ultimately lead to the schism of the Western Church. Here also is to be found the classic characterisation of the antihero of the *Lutherbild*, Johannes Tetzel, as the 'hawker of indulgences'.²⁹⁶ Importantly, Luther's challenge is cast as a typical academic exercise while the reactions of the institutional Church are shown to be antagonistic, forcing Luther to adopt an entrenched position. With the highly dramatic act of All Saints' Day 1517 at its very centre, this brief account encapsulates a narrative tradition of historicising the origins of the Reformation that has been repeated *ad infinitum* for over four hundred years.²⁹⁷ Such succinct and

²⁹⁴ Robert M. Rayner, *A Middle School History of England: 1485-1714*, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1933), II, pp. 18-19.

²⁹⁵ Compare, for example, the description of the Reformation's birth in G. R. Elton, *Reformation Europe: 1517-1559* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963; 1999), p. 1. Indeed, in the afterword to the second edition of *Reformation Europe*, Andrew Pettegree acknowledges the influence of Elton's work and interpretation on him and other post-war historians; *ibid.*, p. 233.

²⁹⁶ For similar depictions of Tetzel as a sinister peddler of indulgences, see Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* (New Haven, CO: Yale Univ. P., 1989), pp. 188-189.

²⁹⁷ The 31 October 1517 has been regarded as the beginning of the Reformation since at least 1617 when the first major commemorative celebration of the movement took place, and continues to be marked today in German-speaking Protestant areas as the *Reformationstag*, which itself was first held in 1688. For further information on the first commemoration, see Charles Zika, 'The Reformation

reductive accounts, suitable for the school textbook, have clear limitations; however, they do reflect a durable historical understanding of the early sixteenth century which is ultimately based on Melanchthon's *Historia de vita et actis Martini Lutheri*.

2. Historicity of *Thesenanschlag*

The posting of the ninety-five theses has been described as one of the most carefully researched events in German history,²⁹⁸ and yet its origins and factual validity are somewhat elusive. In his own writings, Luther never referred to the posting of the theses itself, but rather only to his regret at the way in which they had spread around Germany.²⁹⁹ Documentary evidence does exist, however, to indicate that Luther did send the theses to Albrecht of Mainz and to the local ordinary, Hieronymus Schulze, strengthening Luther's later statement that he had followed the correct procedure for raising theological debate.³⁰⁰ This argument is reinforced by Luther's claim that the theses were not simply an articulation of his own opinion, and that some were intended purely to question indulgence practice and stimulate discussion.³⁰¹

Jubilee of 1617: Appropriating the Past Through Centenary Celebration', in *Exorcising our Demons: Magic, Witchcraft and Visual Culture in Early-Modern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 197-236.

²⁹⁸ Martin Treu, 'Der Thesenanschlag fand wirklich statt: ein neuer Beleg aus der Universitätsbibliothek Jena', *Luther*, 78.3 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 140-144 (p. 143).

²⁹⁹ In the 1541 pamphlet *Wider Hans Worst*, Luther asserts his regret at the rapid dissemination of his ninety-five theses throughout Germany; see Martin Luther, WA, 51, 540.15 – 541.7. In a letter to Amsdorf of 1 November 1527, Luther does refer, however, to having celebrated the tenth anniversary of 'tramping down' the theses the previous day, 'Wittenbergae die Omnium Sanctorum, anno decimo Indulgentiarum conculcatarum, quarum memoria hac hora bibimus utrinque consolati 1527'; see Luther, *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimarer Ausgabe), *Briefe*, 18 vols (Weimar: Böhlau, 1930-1985) [hereafter *WA Br.*], 4, 275. 25-27. The question of Luther's claims regarding the posting of the theses is discussed further in Erwin Iserloh, *The Theses Were Not Posted: Luther between Reform and Reformation* (London: Chapman, 1968), pp. 55-62.

³⁰⁰ Of the letters claimed to be sent by Luther, only that addressed to Albrecht of Mainz has been preserved; see Luther, *WA Br.*, 1, 110-112, and 4, 275.25ff. It has been argued, however, that both letters were most likely very similar in content; see Walther von Loewenich, *Martin Luther: Der Mann und das Werk* (Munich: List, 1982), p. 104.

³⁰¹ In the preface to the theses, Luther clearly states that the theses are to be discussed at a disputation at the University of Wittenberg: 'Amore et studio elucidande veritatis hec subscripta disputabuntur Wittenberge, Presidente R. P. Martino Luther, Artium et S. Theologie Magistro eiusdemque ibidem lectore Ordinario. Quare petit, ut qui non possunt verbis presentes nobiscum disceptare organum id literis absentes. In nomine domini nostril Ihesu Christi. Amen.' See Luther, *WA*, 1, 233-238.1-9. In the letter to Pope Leo X that accompanied the publication of the *Resolutiones* in 1518, Luther claims once again that he sought only to stimulate debate; see Luther, *WA*, 1, 528.18-26. Similarly, in his letter to Christoph Scheurl of 5 March 1518, this claim is supported in Luther's regret at the spread of the theses which were intended for the learned and not the public: 'Primum, quod miraris, cur non ad vos

The status of the episode was long questioned owing to its lack of objective, historical proof, and in the second half of the twentieth century, the debate as to whether the event ever actually took place concluded that it did not happen,³⁰² at least not in the way presented by many histories derived from Melanchthon's account, with Luther's personal nailing of the theses to the church door, and this conclusion has largely been accepted by modern scholars. Nevertheless, while the episode has generally been consigned to the realm of Protestant myth, later accounts have continued to include the posting of the theses, thereby illustrating the episode's power in the Luther narrative. This is borne out by a survey of some of the major works of the last thirty years; Oberman, for example, relates the event in a simple narrative that recalls Melanchthon's telling while Manns, Marius and Genthe all question the veracity of the legend but provide the standard representation nevertheless.³⁰³ This model of acknowledging scholarly doubt while providing the accepted account is found in MacCulloch's recent history of the Reformation, indicating the difficulty of removing such a key narrative episode from a history that is otherwise lacking in episodes accepted as historical fact.³⁰⁴ As these accounts make clear, the episode has assumed a significance to the Luther story despite the absence of historical data, so much so that the reader expects to find the episode in any telling of Luther's life. In this instance, the episode reinforces Luther's centrality to the start of the Reformation; as such, while scholars may debate and must acknowledge the dubious historical nature of the episode, they cannot remove it from their narratives as to do so would disappoint readers' expectations. Moreover, the episode's removal would challenge an understanding of Luther as the catalyst of reform that has dominated both Protestant and Roman Catholic understanding for over four hundred years. As with all chronology, historical narratives require a beginning, and the Ninety-Five Theses episode, however dubious historically,

eas miserim, respondeo, quod non fuit consilium negre votum eas evulgari, sed cum aucis apud et circum nos habitantibus primum super ipsis confeni, ut sic multorum indicio vel damnatae abolerentur vel probatae ederentur.' See Luther, *WA Br.*, 1, 152.6-10.

³⁰² See Erwin Iserloh, *The Theses Were Not Posted: Luther between Reform and Reformation* (London: Chapman, 1968).

³⁰³ See Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil* (New Haven: Yale Univ. P., 1989), p. 190; Peter Manns, *Martin Luther* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1982), p. 91; Richard Marius, *Martin Luther: The Christian between Man and God* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. P., 1999), pp. 137-138; Hans Jochen Genthe, *Martin Luther: Sein Leben und Denken*, Bensheimer Hefte, 77 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), p. 117.

³⁰⁴ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided 1490-1700* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), p. 123.

provides a single and readily identifiable act with which to begin a history of the Reformation.

Despite the attempts of Iserloh and Aland to prove otherwise,³⁰⁵ the legend of Luther nailing his theses against indulgences to the Castle Church door has retained a key status in Luther's story and that of the Reformation, no doubt in part because of its visually dramatic qualities, but also because the episode provides a single, identifiable act that marks the birth of the Lutheran movement; as such, history is here at the mercy of narrative. Thus, the Ninety-Five Theses are cast, if not as a clear break from Rome, as the beginning of the Reformation at the very least, and thereby of Luther's active decision to reform the Church. Such an emplotment is of course overly reductive and denies Luther's post-1517 contribution to Lutheran theology; this naïve emplotment reflects, however, the interpretation found in many accounts of Luther's life that his significance lies in the act that famously began the Reformation rather than in the years that followed.³⁰⁶ This interpretation takes advantage of an obvious narrative episode of the nailing of the theses as the climax to the Luther story thus far; yet the consequential underplaying of Luther's later adulthood is all the more curious given that Luther's post-1517 theological writings contributed more to the course of the Lutheran movement than the posting of the Ninety-Five Theses.³⁰⁷ The active posting of the theses is significant, however, to an understanding of Luther's character; in the classic Protestant tradition, Luther rejects in his posting of the theses the Catholic Church and its medieval theology, specifically the practice of indulgences.³⁰⁸ If the posting of the theses did not take place, as Iserloh argues, Luther remained a faithful Roman Catholic monk who sought to open a theological discussion on the practice of indulgences, and was not the defiant figure challenging the Church as seen in much Protestant writing. In this interpretation, Luther is thus seen initially as a more passive figure seeking not to challenge but to debate questions of theology in an established academic practice.

³⁰⁵ For Iserloh's and Aland's contribution, see p. 6, note 17.

³⁰⁶ This interpretation with its focus on Luther's earlier years recalls similarities with biblical figures whose biographies concentrate on youth and early adulthood; the most obvious examples are Jesus, Moses and John the Baptist. See Richard Burridge, *What are the Gospels?*, pp. 135-138 and pp. 197-198.

³⁰⁷ A chronological survey of Luther's writings reveals that the majority of his theological works were written in the last twenty-nine years of his life after 1517, and were of greater significance than the 95 Theses.

³⁰⁸ See, for example, Oberman's treatment in *Luther: Man between God and the Devil*, p. 190.

3. Melanchthon's *Historia*

The account of the posting of the theses found in Melanchthon provides a very plain narrative whose very simplicity leads one to assume its authenticity; at the same time, however, that apparent simplicity, itself a hallmark of Melanchthon's narrative, masks the complex question of the account's veracity.

In hoc cursu cum esset Lutherus, circumferuntur venales Indulgentiae in his regionibus a *Tecelio* Dominicano, impudentissimo sycophanta, cuius impiis et nefariis concionibus irritatus Lutherus, studio pietatis ardens, edidit Propositiones de Indulgentiis, quae in primo Tomo monumentorum ipsius extant, Et has publice Templo, quod Arci Witebergensi contiguum est, affixit pridie festi omnium Sanctorum, Anno 1517.

Hic Tecelius nihil sui dissimilis, ac sperans etiam gratiam se apud Romanum Pontificem initurum esse, suum Senatum convocat, Monachos aliquot et Theologos sophistica sua utcumque leviter tinctos, hos componere aliquid iubet adversus Lutherum. Ipse interea, ne esset *χωρόν πρόσωπον*, non iam Conciones, sed fulmina in Lutherum torquet, vociferatur ubique hunc haereticum igni perdendum esse, Propositiones etiam Lutheri et Concionem de Indulgentiis publice coniicit in flammis. Hi furores Tecelii et eius Satellitum imponunt necessitatem Luthero de rebus iisdem copiosius disserendi, et tuendae veritatis. Haec initia fuerunt huius controversiae, in qua Lutherus nihil adhuc suspicans aut somnians de futura mutatione rituum, ne quidem ipsas Indulgentias prorsus abiiciebat, sed tantum moderationem flagitabat. (Bii^f-Biii^v)

Published as the preface to the second volume of Luther's collected works, the *Historia* has long been accepted as the earliest known account of the posting of the theses.³⁰⁹ It is, of course, no eye-witness account given that Melanchthon was

³⁰⁹ See the research of Aland and Iserloh on the dating of the origins of this episode: Kurt Aland, 'Luthers Thesenanschlag: Tatsache oder Legende?', *Deutsches Pfarrblatt*, LXII (1962), 241-4; Aland, *Martin Luthers 95 Thesen: Mit den dazugehörigen Dokumenten aus der Geschichte der Reformation* (Hamburg: Furche, 1965) and Erwin Iserloh, *The Theses Were Not Posted: Luther between Reform and Reformation* (London: Chapman, 1968), pp. 65-75 (p. 73).

still a student in Tübingen in 1517 and did not arrive in Wittenberg until 1518;³¹⁰ nevertheless, despite the episode's questionable authenticity and Melanchthon's dubious credibility as its earliest 'witness',³¹¹ the posting of the Theses has assumed great significance in the scholarly as well as the general understanding of the period and for the last five hundred years has been constructed as the major event in the development of the Reformation.³¹²

On a purely factual level, Melanchthon's account contains several errors. The first of these refers to where the indulgences were being distributed: 'in hic regionibus' suggests it was in Wittenberg rather than nearby Jüterbog in Brandenburg. Frederick the Wise had specifically forbidden their preaching and circulation in his territories, and the Dominican Tetzel followed this injunction;³¹³ Tetzel's preaching in Jüterbog drew people from nearby Wittenberg, however, and it was this that specifically attracted Luther's attention.³¹⁴ Secondly, Tetzel's burning of Luther's theses never actually took place and Melanchthon's dating of Luther's work is incorrect.³¹⁵ Such infelicities are not unusual in the *Historia*, nevertheless, with further examples being the dating of Luther's journey to Rome, his lecturing on physics, where it should be ethics, and the dating of his lectures on the Psalms [actually 1513-15] after the lectures on Romans [actually 1515-16]. The most controversial aspect of the narrative, however, relates to the posting of the theses. If Melanchthon's narrative is to be believed, Luther personally nailed the theses to the church door; while possible, this is unlikely to be so as the university statutes indicated that it was both the practice and the duty of faculty deans or the beadle to carry out such acts, and not that of a university professor; moreover, such theses were to be posted to the doors of the churches in Wittenberg, and not just that of the

³¹⁰ For a brief overview of Melanchthon's early life and career, see Clyde L. Manschreck, *Melanchthon: The Quiet Reformer* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1958), pp.19-58 (p. 43).

³¹¹ See Iserloh, *The Theses Were Not Posted*, pp. 98-110.

³¹² See Iserloh, *The Theses Were Not Posted*, p. 73.

³¹³ In fact, Frederick's ancestors had long restricted the authority of the popes in offering indulgences in Saxony; in 1458, Frederick II had forced the Roman legate to agree to surrender half the proceeds of a Turkish indulgence in 1458; see Felican Gess, ed., *Akten und Briefe zur Kirchenpolitik Herzog Georgs von Sachsen* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1905), I, p. lxxvii. Similarly, on Frederick the Wise's restrictions on the sale of indulgences, see Rudolph W. Heinze, *Reform and Conflict: From the Medieval World to the Wars of Religion, AD 1350-1648*, Baker History of the Church (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), p. 83.

³¹⁴ See Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1483-1521I*, trans. by James L. Schaff, 3 vols (Philadelphia: Westminster P., 1895), I, pp. 178-179.

³¹⁵ Melanchthon states: 'Propositiones etiam Lutheri et Concionem de Indulgentiis publice coniiicit in flammis', *Historia*, Bii^f.

Castle Church.³¹⁶ The effect of Luther personally posting the theses to a single door of a single church is, however, more dramatic and reinforces the characterisation of Luther's wilful pursuit of theological truth; it casts Luther's response into a singulative act and a single moment as a turning point in history. If historically inaccurate, such narrative 'rectifications' may have been justified by Melanchthon's interpretation.

While Melanchthon's description of the *Thesenanschlag* is accepted as the earliest documented account of the episode, the act of its writing did not take place until 1546, that is after Luther's death and almost thirty years after the theses were allegedly posted. Reference is, of course, made to the posting of the theses in Frederick the Wise's dream on the night of 30 October 1517 of the saints allowing a monk, who happens to be faithful to the Pauline tradition, to write on the Wittenberg church door, thereby causing damage to the pope and the Roman Church; however, this has now been shown to be a legend of seventeenth-century origin and, therefore, does not support the veracity of Melanchthon's account.³¹⁷ No major history published prior to Luther's death provides a description of the *Thesenanschlag* itself; it is absent from the 'Protestant' sources of Scheurl,³¹⁸ Carion,³¹⁹ Myconius,³²⁰ Spalatin, and Sleidanus.³²¹ Nor is it mentioned in the earlier accounts by Catholic

³¹⁶ The statutes suggest that the dean of the appropriate faculty published theses for university disputations: 'Promotiones similiter et disputationes intimet valuis ecclesiarum feria praecedente specivocando nomina promotoris, promovendi, praesidentis et respondentis', *Die Wittenberger Universitäts- und Fakultätsstatuten vom Jahre 1508*, ed. by T. Muther (Halle: Buchhandlung des Weisenhauses, 1867), p. 18. This fact is echoed in the statutes for the arts faculty, *ibid.*, p. 42. Elsewhere, the statutes record the duty as that of a beadle: 'Bidellorum munus esto ... disputationes, promotiones, in scholis publicare et ecclesiarum values intimare'; see W. Friedensburg, *Urkundenbuch der Universität Wittenberg*, 2 vols, (1502-1611) (Magdeburg: Historische Kommission, Magdeburg & E. Holtermann, 1936), I, p. 13.

³¹⁷ David Krautvogel published a broadsheet account of the dream for the 1617 celebrations, alleging that it had passed from Frederick the Wise to Spalatin, to the superintendent of Rochlitz, Antonius Musa, whence Krautvogel acquired the legend. An account of the dream had, in fact, already, been published in 1604 by the Dresden court preacher, Hoe von Hoenegg; see Hans Volz, 'Der Traum Kurfürst Friedrichs des Weisen vom 30./31. Oktober, 1517', *Gutenberg Jahrbuch* (1970), 174-211 (pp. 181-197). For further information on the origins and the significance of this dream, see Robert W. Scribner, *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany* (London: Hambledon, 1987), pp. 301-305.

³¹⁸ Scheurl clearly indicates that Luther did not want to circulate the theses in his chronicle for the years 1517 and 1518, in '*Geschichtsbuch der Christenheit von 1511 bis 1521*', ed. by J. K. F. Knaake, in *Jahrbücher des deutschen Reiches und deutschen Kirche im Zeitalter der Reformation*, 2 vols (Leipzig: T. O. Weigel, 1872), I, pp. 111ff.

³¹⁹ Johann Carion, *Chronica*, ed. by Philip Melanchthon (Wittenberg: Georg Rhaw, 1532).

³²⁰ Friedrich Myconius, *Geschichte der Reformation* (c. 1542), ed. by Ernst Salomon Cyprian (Gotha: Andreas Schallen, 1715).

³²¹ Johannes Sleidanus, *Commentarius de status religionis* (Strassburg: Vuendelini Rihelij, 1555).

writers, including Leib,³²² Emser,³²³ and Cochlaeus.³²⁴ Moreover, the *Historia*'s account is the product of a 'witness' who did not arrive in Wittenberg until August 1518, at least nine months after the alleged posting; thus, its authenticity as primary evidence is not accepted and has largely been dismissed by the scholarly community. Nevertheless, its dramatic qualities have allowed the episode to gain a certain mythic status and it has become one of the central elements of the Luther story.

The veracity of Melanchthon's account has recently received support, however, through the discovery of marginalia by a later assistant to Luther, Georg Rörer,³²⁵ in an edition of the New Testament that was undergoing revision in the 1540s.³²⁶ This account is of course also secondary evidence, but dated 1544, Rörer's account agrees with that provided by Melanchthon. Rörer's reference to the posting of the theses attests to the act itself and follows the accepted practices of the University of Wittenberg in the early sixteenth century. Thus, the first documented statement regarding the *Thesenanschlag* comes from the heart of the Lutheran party, and is repeated in Melanchthon's preface to Luther's collected works; this account is based on Melanchthon's construction of Carion's material, gathered for the *Chronica* and published in 1532. However, in the first editions of the *Chronica*, no mention is made of the actual posting of the theses and this remains the case in all accounts until 1546, the year of Luther's death and the first publication of the *Historia*. Thereafter,

³²² Leib's diary entry for this period makes no reference to a posting of the theses, although the theses are mentioned; see Joseph Schlecht, ed., *Kilian Leibs Briefwechsel und Diarien* (Münster: Aschendorffsche Buchhandlung, 1909), p. 85.

³²³ Hieronymus Emser, *Auff des Stieres tzu Wiettenberg wiettende replica*, ed. by Ludwig Enders, 2 vols. (Halle a. S.: Niemeyer, 1890-1), II, p. 31.

³²⁴ Johannes Cochlaeus, *Commentaria de actis et scriptis Martini Lutheri Saxonis* (Mainz: F. Behem, 1549).

³²⁵ After studying in Leipzig (*baccalaureus* 1515 and *magister* 1520), Georg Rörer (1492-1557) moved to Wittenberg, later becoming the first priest to be ordained in the Lutheran Church in 1525. Following the death of his first wife, Rörer lived with Luther and baptised Luther's eldest son. While this relationship might validate Rörer's authoritative credentials, he was not present in Wittenberg in 1517 and did not, therefore, witness the posting of the theses. While the discovery of Rörer's text does provide an earlier written account of the posting, dated between 1541 and 1544, the description was unpublished and has remained so until its rediscovery in 2007. For further information on Rörer, see Eduard Jacobs, 'Georg Rörer', in *ADB*, 53 (Leipzig: Dunker & Humblot, 1907), p. 480-5, and Ernst Koch, 'Georg Rörer', in *NDB*, 21 (Berlin: Dunker & Humblot, 2003), pp. 735-736.

³²⁶ Rörer's note reads: Anno Do[m]ini 1517 in profesto o[mn]i[u]m Sanctoru[m] p[ro] [...] Wite[m]berge in valuis templorum propositae sunt pro[positiones] de Indulgentiis a D[octore] Mart[ino] Luth[er]; the annotation was found in *Das neue Testament Deutsch* (Wittenberg: Hans Lufft, 1540), held in the Thüringer Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Jena (Jena MS App. 25: 418^r). For further information on Rörer's note, see Joachim Ott, 'Georg Rörer (1492-1557) und sein Nachlass in der Thüringer Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Jena', in Joachim Ott and Martin Treu, eds, *Faszination Thesenanschlag - Faktum oder Fiktion*, Schriften der Stiftung Luthergedenkstätten in Sachsen-Anhalt, 9 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2008), pp. 47-57.

the episode of the posting of the theses is ‘corrected’ in other sources, including the 1572 edition of the *Chronica*; such narrative rectifications occur elsewhere in the *Historia*, notably in reference to Luther’s date of birth.³²⁷

The authority that Melanchthon held as Luther’s closest friend and supporter was such that the episode quickly acquired significant authority. Reproduced countless times thereafter, Melanchthon’s *Historia* once again determines the nature of the *Lutherbild* and the general understanding of the Reformation, as well as indicating the importance attached by Melanchthon to authorizing the image of Luther from the very start of the movement. Thus, the 31 October 1517 is regarded as the birth of the Reformation not because it was the day when Luther wrote his Ninety-Five Theses, nor because he posted the same theses on this day to the door of the Wittenberg *Schloßkirche*, but rather because Melanchthon’s construction of Luther’s biography emplots it as such. In light of the above, Melanchthon’s narrative treatment of the posting of the Ninety-Five Theses and representation of Luther as the active and decisive but simultaneously coerced reformer are crucial to an understanding of the *Historia*.

4. Characterization in the *Historia*’s *Thesenanschlag*

Only two figures are present in the short extract describing the posting of the Ninety-Five Theses, namely Luther and Johannes Tetzel, the Dominican indulgence preacher and the classic antihero of the *Lutherbild*; Melanchthon’s account does provide some individual characterisation of these two figures, and their representation reinforces a distinctly pro-humanist interpretation of the text and implicitly connects the text with the humanist cause. It is, however, Tetzel who dominates the narrative and is the active subject of most sentences, thereby commanding most narrative space and clearly functioning in opposition to Luther both in terms of his actions as well as what he represents; importantly, it is Tetzel who aggressively initiates the episode while Luther passively waits and responds.

The narrative opens with Luther in the midst of his studies; against this peaceful backdrop, Tetzel emerges preaching indulgences:

³²⁷ In the 1566 edition of the *Chronica*, while the posting of the theses is not mentioned, the burning of books is included; see *Chronica* (1566), V, p. 244.

[In hoc cursu cum esset Lutherus,] circumferuntur venales Indulgentiae in hic regionibus a Tecelio Dominicano, impudentissimo Sycophanta, cuius impiis et nefariis concionibus irritatus Lutherus, studio pietatis ardens, edidit Propositiones de Indulgentiis, quae in primo Tomo monumentorum eius extant, et has publice Templo, quod Arci Vuitebergensi contiguum est, affixit pridie festi omnium Sanctorum, Anno 1517. (Bii^r)

It is this single sentence that has largely defined the historical understanding of the origins of the Reformation since the middle of the sixteenth century. Despite its overall brevity, the complexity of the sentence affords further insight into Melanchthon's representation of Luther: Tetzel is the subject of the main clause, while Melanchthon places Luther grammatically in the subordinate and opening clause, 'in hoc cursu cum esset Lutherus', and figuratively in the background of the passage, reinforcing the image of Tetzel as the active aggressor who disrupts Luther. However, Luther's subordinate status is purely grammatical and, significantly, Melanchthon does not allow Tetzel to dominate the syntax of the passage as the main clause description of Tetzel is positioned not just after one but before two further subordinate clauses, and the narrative returns its focus to the effect of Tetzel's preaching on the now angered Luther. Luther is forced to respond and leave his quiet pursuit of piety, 'studio pietatis ardens', itself a stock image of humanist characterization.³²⁸ The logic of the passage suggests that Luther would have continued in his pious studies had he not been disturbed; it is Tetzel's arrival in Jüteborg and, in the passage, mid-sentence that compels Luther to act. This shift in Luther's characterization from passive to active calls to mind Luther's own description of his necessary and coerced vow to become a monk.³²⁹ In turn, the passage's syntax and Melanchthon's representation combine to suggest that Luther is a divine agent called to do that which is necessary.

Melanchthon's description of Tetzel, 'impudentissimo Sycophanta', has not only been influential in casting the Dominican as the villain of the story, but also

³²⁸ See Erasmus's description of John Colet in his letter to Jodocus Jonas of 13 June 1521, in P. S. Allen, ed., *Opus epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. P., 1906-1958), IV, 507-27.

³²⁹ For further information on Luther's vow, see Melanchthon, *Historia*, Avi^r-Avii^v, and on the understanding of Luther's vow, see this chapter, p. 163, nn. 385-386, and p. 164, nn. 388-389.

reflects the humanist preference for Greek to emphasize the invective in abuse.³³⁰

Sycophanta, from the Greek συκοφάντης, implies not just a ‘slanderer’ but also a ‘trickster’, thereby reinforcing Melanchthon’s view of Tetzel as well as the Reformed attitude to the sale of indulgences, which had been licensed by the Church at that time.

Without any indication of chronology, Melanchthon’s narrative suggests that Luther was angered and responded as soon as Tetzel began to preach, ‘cuius impiis et nefariis concionibus irritatus Lutherus [...]’. The historical record indicates, however, that indulgence preaching was a well-established practice prior to 1517, and that Tetzel had preached indulgences since 1503. Furthermore, it has been argued that Tetzel first preached indulgences in Jüterbog, referred to simply as ‘in hic regionibus’, as early as Maundy Thursday (10 April) 1517, several months before Luther’s theses were made public.³³¹ The narrative connection of the two episodes in such a close temporal relationship as action and reaction is unjustified; however, it is significant to Melanchthon’s representation that Luther responds instantaneously to the issue as if it were his first encounter with the practice of indulgences. Finally, other sources indicate that it was the penitents’ lack of contrition when demanding absolution that drove Luther to act rather than the indulgence trade *per se*.³³² Through this highly selective treatment of historical data, Melanchthon binds the two episodes together as cause and consequence, again reinforcing the notion that Luther was forced into action by Tetzel’s impious actions, thereby exculpating Luther of the initial aggression. Melanchthon’s cavalier attitude toward the sequence of events has already been seen in the dating of Luther’s birth, and it is clear that he is prepared to manipulate the chronology of events to suit his overall interpretative principle, and thereby create a more appealing representation of his hero; it is for this reason that Luther is seen personally to respond and post his Ninety-Five Theses in this singulative, dramatic act.

³³⁰ See Erika Rummel, ‘The Use of Greek in Erasmus’ Letters’, *Humanistica Lovaniensia*, vol. 30 (1981), 55-92 (p. 69).

³³¹ See the description of the events leading to Luther’s response in Gottfried Hecht, *Vita Joannis Tezelii* (Wittenberg: G. Zimmermann, 1717), 53 sq., or Nikolaus Paulus, *Johann Tetzel: Der Ablassprediger* (Mainz: Kirchheim, 1899), p. 41.

³³² See Friedrich Myconius’s earlier treatment of the indulgence controversy in his *Geschichte der Reformation* (1541-2), ed. by Otto Clemen, Voigtländers Quellenbücher, 68 (Leipzig: Voigtländer: 1914), pp. 20-22. Myconius died in 1546 but left a handwritten account of the Reformation that was not published until 1715 by Ernst Salomon Cyripian, in *Friderici Myconii Historia Reformationis vom Jahr Christi 1517 bis 1542* (Leipzig: Schallen, 1715).

The narrative lacks detail similarly in its description of Luther's posting of the theses:

[E]t has publice Templo, quod Arci Vuitebergensi contiguum est, affixit pridie festi omnium Sanctorum, Anno 1517. (Bii^r)³³³

On this simple final clause hangs the origin of the Protestant legend of the beginning of the Reformation in Luther's nailing of the Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. This episode, as recorded by Melanchthon, has been repeated *ad infinitum* in histories with or without various embellishments over the last five hundred years; importantly, Melanchthon's own casting of the event conforms stylistically and interpretatively to the general mode of representation in the *Historia*. His choice of the word *templum* over the neo-Latin *ecclesia* indicates his humanist preference for Classical phrasing as well as demonstrating his own humanism; this usage along with the earlier *sycophanta* reflects the practice of advocating humanism directly as well as indirectly.³³⁴ It also indicates the humanist desire for more accurate linguistic usage; *ecclesia*, derived from the Greek ἐκκλησία, properly suggests a body of people rather than a building, more accurately provided by *templum*. Significantly, the use of *templum* binds Melanchthon's account with the chronologically earlier description by Rörer, where it too is to be found albeit given accurately in the plural.³³⁵ As has already been indicated, Rörer's use of the plural agrees with contemporary university practices in Wittenberg;³³⁶ Melanchthon's preference for the singular may partly indicate a desire to give prominence to the Castle Church, and thereby Frederick the Wise's importance to the Reformation's

³³³ The year 1517 as the *birth* of the Reformation most likely bore an astrological importance for Melanchthon in that it witnessed the movement of Pluto through Capricorn, a phenomenon that had been associated with the establishment of a new world order. Pluto had long been regarded as the catalyst for change while Capricorn was represented society's institutions and traditions, including the Church. For this reason, Pluto had mythological associations with death and re-birth. Significantly, Pluto had moved through Capricorn in 42 A.D. when Paul was reckoned to undergo his conversion on the road to Damascus, again in 287 A.D. when Constantine was crowned and Christianity became the 'official' religion of the Roman Empire. Given Melanchthon's astrological interests, this fact cannot have escaped him, especially as it did not require any rectification. See Nicholas Campion, *The Great Year: Astrology, Millenarianism, and History in the Western Tradition* (London: Arkana, 1994).

³³⁴ See, for example, John F. Tinkler, 'The Rhetorical Method of Francis Bacon's *History of the Reign of King Henry VII*', *History and Theory*, 26, vol. 1 (1987), 32-52 (p. 47), and Hannah H. Gray, 'Renaissance Humanism: The Pursuit of Eloquence', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 24, vol. 4 (1963), 497-514 (p. 512).

³³⁵ See p. 142, n. 326.

³³⁶ See p. 141, n. 316.

development. The use of the singular may also indicate Melanchthon's desire to stress the significance of the action; the single act of posting the theses to a single church casts Luther's action in a singulative mode and thereby highlights the unique nature of the episode.

The use of the verb *affigere* distinguishes Melanchthon's account further; the combination of the single church and Luther's personal posting provides a narratively dramatic effect and suggests a narrative rectification in the *Historia* to cast Luther personally as the single, origin of the Reformation. As with the dating of Luther's birth, Melanchthon simply records the date as the feast of All Saints 1517, and it is the very singulative aspect of the *Thesenanschlag* found in Melanchthon's account that has given the episode such potency in the *Lutherbild*.³³⁷ The combination of this dramatic act and the provision of a date have been accepted by subsequent generations as the start of the Reformation, indicating Melanchthon's control and authorization of Luther's legacy and image.

In focussing on two characters, Melanchthon's account personalises the controversy into a conflict between Luther and Tetzel; this conflict is reinforced not only through the positive description and characterisation of the two figures as protagonist and antagonist but also by the selective absence of information. For example, after having fled public life and returned to his Leipzig monastery in 1518, Tetzel suffered accusations of immorality and dishonesty from the papal nuncio at the Disputation of Leipzig in 1519, Carl von Miltitz. Somewhat surprisingly, given Melanchthon's account at least, it was Luther who tried to console him and acknowledged that the conflict was not of his [Tetzel's] instigation.³³⁸ In

³³⁷ See Volker Leppin, 'Die Monumentalisierung Luthers', in Ott, Joachim and Martin Treu, eds, *Faszination Thesenanschlag - Faktum oder Fiktion*, Schriften der Stiftung Luthergedenkstätten in Sachsen-Anhalt, 9 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2008), pp. 69-92 (p. 86).

³³⁸ Luther's more benign attitude to Tetzel is seen both in his lament in a letter to Johannes Lang that the latter was being publicly attacked, see Luther's letter of March 21 1518, *WA Br.* 1, 155.24-38, as well as declaring in a letter from January 1519 to Tetzel himself 'that the agitation was not that of his [Tetzel's] creation, but that the child had an entirely different father'; this anecdote is somewhat unreliably provided by Hieronymus Emser: 'Tzum andern wiewol Luter seyner sach, erstlich ein guten scheyn gemacht, mit dem aplas unnd Tetzlins predigen, Noch dann so hat er gemeltem Tetzlin seliger gedechtnis, mit seiner eigen hand tzugescriben, er sol sich unbekumert lassen, Dann die sach sey von seyner wegen nith angefangen, sonder hab das kind vil ein andern vatter, Welches ich yne, wo es von noten, ouch uberweysen kan.' See Hieronymus Emser, 'Auff des Stieres tzu Wiettenberg wietende replica', in *Luther und Emser: Ihre Streitschriften aus dem Jahre 1521*, ed. by Ludwig Enders, 2 vols (vol. 2), Flugschriften aus der Reformationszeit, IX (Halle a. S.: Niemeyer, 1890), pp. 27-44 (p. 31).

Melanchthon's representation, a clear animosity is present between Luther and Tetzel.

One effect of the narrative's characterization thus far is to singulate the 'corruption' of Roman Catholic theology into the person of Tetzel who acts as a metonym for the sins of the institution. As such, Tetzel's vainglorious defence of indulgences is described as nothing more than an attempt to gain favour, itself no doubt an iterative indictment of Roman clergy:

Hic Tecelius nihil sui dissimilis, ac sperans etiam gratiam se apud
Romanum Pontificem initurum esse, suum Senatum convocat, Monachos
aliquot et Theologos Sophistica sua utcumque leviter tinctos, hos
componere aliquid iubet adversus Lutherum. (Bii^r)

Thus, the iterative 'sins' of Roman Catholic clergy are personified in the metonymic figure of Tetzel whose singulative actions in turn add to the negative depiction of the Catholic priests in general. Melanchthon's criticism of Tetzel reflects his understanding of character as being fixed at birth and a product of one's lineage; Tetzel must behave in the way that he does as he would otherwise not be behaving according to his character, 'nihil sui dissimilis', in exactly the same way that Melanchthon's Luther must respond honourably and piously given his own background, as established earlier in the *Historia*.³³⁹ Tetzel's response is to call for help, cast here as the gathering of a *senatus*, again following the humanist preference for classical allusions. Melanchthon uses this council as an opportunity to cast Tetzel's supporters, and co-representatives of the Roman Church, not just as secular and political, as *senatus* suggests, but also as representatives of scholastic learning, the opponent to Melanchthon's humanism. Melanchthon continues his attack in his description of these supporters as being '[s]ophistica sua [...] leviter tinctos'; the criticism lies of course not only in their choice of sophist learning but also in that the supporters' learning is only lightly imbued, and is extended through the pun on the verb which carries the sense of *to baptise*. In this way, Melanchthon demonstrates that the support for indulgences comes from a base individual seeking favour with his superior, and who is supported by pedantic and antiquated followers; this attack

³³⁹ See Melanchthon, *Historia*, Av^v-Av^r.

draws Tetzel *et al* into sharp contrast with Melanchthon's image of the isolated Luther, 'studio pietatis ardens'. In this way, the conflict becomes for Melanchthon one between scholasticism and humanism, personified in Tetzel and Luther.

Having established the nature of Luther's opponents as scholastics seeking their own gain, Melanchthon continues by showing how their actions, no doubt a combination of both their education and very nature, lack any reason or openness to debate. Melanchthon does this by developing his previously established depiction of Tetzel as a sounding brass who seeks merely to augment his own position; this occurs in Melanchthon's adoption of humanist Greek in his deliberately understated description of Tetzel as a *χωφών πρόσωπον*, a term resonant of the Gospels and Christ's healing of the dumb.³⁴⁰

Ipse interea, ne esset *χωφών πρόσωπον*, non iam Conciones, sed fulmina
in Lutherum torquet, vociferatur ubique hunc Haereticum igni
perdendum esse, Propositiones etiam Lutheri et Concionem de
Indulgentiis publice coniicit in flammas. Hi furores Tecelii et eius
Satellitum imponunt necessitatem Luthero de rebus iisdem copiosius
disserendi, et tuendae veritatis. (Bii^r)

It is significant that Tetzel does not simply offer public debate to challenge Luther, 'non iam Conciones', an area where Melanchthon has previously highlighted Luther's talents,³⁴¹ but resorts to almost hysterical attacks and calls for Luther and his writings to be burned, the fate of and means to silence the heretic; the narrative here returns to language of flames and burning that have been present throughout the passage. In so doing, Melanchthon proleptically connects Tetzel's demands with both the papal excommunication of Luther and Luther's subsequent response, namely the burning of the bull of excommunication. Tetzel's hysteria is furthered through the use of the verb *vocifero*, 'to bawl' or 'to scream', which is again carried in the next sentence's reference to his 'furores', or mad ravings. It is significant that such 'furores' do not come from Tetzel alone but also from his henchmen, or *satellites*, again indicating that Tetzel is but a singulative example of the larger

³⁴⁰ The noun *χωφών* is used six times in Matthew where it occurs in Christ's healing of the man possessed; see Matthew 9. 32-33, Matthew 11. 5, Matthew 12. 22, and Matthew 15. 30-31.

³⁴¹ See Melanchthon, *Historia*, Av^r and Avi^{v-r}.

institution that speaks with one voice. For the sixteenth-century reader versed in the Vulgate, the word carries a somewhat sinister connotation and indicates the murderous ‘messengers’ sent to watch over and slay David.³⁴²

The effect of Tetzels ‘abuse’ is to force Luther to defend his position if Melanchthon’s narrative is to be believed; in this way, the account returns to its opening proposition that Luther was disturbed mid-studies and only entered the debate after being forced by Tetzels. Luther’s reaction is, of course, not to reply in a similar fashion but rather to enter into discussion in his desire to preserve the truth, ‘copiosius disserendi, et tuendae veritatis’, both ideals that had previously been identified by Melanchthon as key characteristics of Luther’s nature.³⁴³ The parallels with Erasmus’s statement of his own position in answering Luther’s theology of free will are obvious here, and indicate not only Melanchthon’s desire to cast Luther as a humanist who is unwillingly drawn into controversy in a bid to defend truth, but also a standard trope;³⁴⁴ Luther himself had explained his actions as borne of necessity in the letter to Leo X that accompanied the *Resolutiones disputationum de indulgentiarum virtute* (1518).³⁴⁵ The narrative closes with the assertion that Luther

³⁴² The noun *satellites* occurs but once in the Vulgate in the attempt on David’s life in 1 Samuel 19.11.

³⁴³ By this stage in the narrative, Melanchthon has clearly established a characterisation of Luther as an honest individual whose gift for discussion leads him to truth; for examples of how these characteristics are displayed, see Melanchthon, *Historia*, Av^r and Av^{v-r}.

³⁴⁴ ‘Cui [Luther] tam etsi iam non ab uno responsum est, tamen quando ita visum est amicis, experiar et ipse, num ex nostra quo que; conflictatiuncula veritas redid posit dilucidior’ see Erasmus, *De Libero arbitrio διατριβή sive collatio* (Basel: Froben, 1524), A².

³⁴⁵ ‘Nunc, quid faciam? Revocare non possum et miram mihi invidiam ex ea invulgarione video conflari: invitus venio in publicum periculolissimumque ac varium hominum indicium, praesertim ego indoctus, stupidus ingenio, vacuus eruditione, deinde nostro florentissimo saeculo, quod pro sua in literis et ingeniis felicitate etiam Ciceronem cogere posit ad angulum, lucis et publici alioqui non ignarum rectatorem. Sed cogit necessitas, me anserem strepere inter olores. Haque quo et ipsos adversarios mitigem et desideria multorum expleam, emitto ecce meas nugas declarationas mearum disputationum, emitto autem, quo tutior sim, sub tui nominis praesidio et tuae protectionis umbra, Beatisime pater, in quibus intelligent omnes qui volent, quam pure simpliciterque ecclesiasticam potestatem et reverentiam Clavium quaesierium et coluerium, simulque quam inique et false me tot nominibus adversarii foedaverint...Quare, Beatissime Pater, prostratum me pedibus tuae Beatitudinis offero cum omnibus, quae sum et habeo. Vivifica, occide, voca, revoca, approba, reproba, ut placuerit: vocem tua Christi in te praesidentis et loquentis agroscam Si mortem mueri, mori non recusabo.’ Luther, *WA*, 1, 525-625 (529). It is interesting to note Luther’s self-comparison here with a goose rather than a swan; this comparison would change by 1531 when he described himself as the more powerful swan successor to Hus’s goose. See A. Hauffen, ‘Husz eine Gans – Luther ein Schwan’, in *Untersuchungen und Quellen zur germanischen und romanischen Philologie, Johann von Kelle dargebracht von seinen Kollegen und Schülern*, Prager deutsche Studien, Heft 9, ii (Prague: C. Bellmann, 1908), pp. 1-28.

did not wish to challenge indulgences or change rites but merely wished to advocate moderation, one of the cardinal virtues so prized by humanists:³⁴⁶

Haec initia fuerunt huius controversiae, in qua Lutherus nihil adhuc
suspicans aut somnians de futura mutatione rituum, ne quidem ipsas
Indulgentias prorsus abiiciebat, sed tantum moderationem flagitabat.
Quare falso eum calumniantur, qui a plausibili causa exorsum dicunt, ut
postea mutaret Rempubicam et vel sibi vel aliis potentiam quaereret.
(Bii^r-Biii^v)

Importantly, the closing lines allow Melanchthon to dismiss the charges of Luther's critics that he ultimately sought nothing but his own advancement rather than theological truth.³⁴⁷ By adopting this non-prolepsis, Melanchthon anticipates potential criticism and is able to remove a fuller treatment from his narrative without offering further explanation.

Melanchthon casts the beginning of the indulgences controversy as a conflict between scholasticism and humanism through selective interpretation and deliberate depiction, represented in the persons of Tetzel and Luther. Humanist language and imagery reinforce the positive depiction of Luther and develop Melanchthon's championing of Luther's cause, which at times is almost synonymous with humanism.

5. Classical and Humanist References

One obvious way in which the account of the posting of the theses demonstrates Melanchthon's humanist credentials is in his use of Greek; in part, this use is hardly surprising for one of the leading sixteenth-century Hellenists, and functions as a way of indicating his belonging to the humanist movement, while simultaneously reflecting general humanist practices as well as Melanchthon's relationship to the

³⁴⁶ See p. 190, note 445.

³⁴⁷ See, for example, Cochlaeus's statement: 'Luthero autem contra augebatur autoritas, favour, fides, existimatio, fama: quod tam liber acerbique videretur veritatis assertor, contra fraudes Quaestorum et fumos Bullarum, quas non gratis darent, sed pecuriis venderent Indulgentiarū Commissarii.' Johannes Cochlaeus, *Commentaria de actis et scriptis Martini Lutheri Saxonis* (Mainz: Franz Behem, 1549), Aⁱⁱⁱⁱ.

text and to his readers. Although the narrative dealing with the posting of the Ninety-Five Theses totals only 233 words, Melanchthon opts for Greek or words of Greek derivation on no fewer than fifteen occasions. These usages occur in a variety of forms, all of which correspond to standard humanist practice. As has been shown, there are two considerations in the use of Greek, or any other foreign language, in writing: the quality of the word to be used and the context in which it is to be used.³⁴⁸ Melanchthon's account of the posting of the theses shows an awareness of both questions which deserves further attention.

The first such instance occurs in Melanchthon's description of Tetzl as a shameless sycophant, 'impudentissimo Sycophanta'. This insult is, of course, derived from the Greek συκοφάντης; *sycophanta* is constructed from the noun *sykon*, σῦκον or 'a fig', and the verb *phanein*, φαίνειν or 'to show'. However, this straightforward usage reveals several levels of interpretation.³⁴⁹ First, a direct translation from the related noun *impudentissimus* offers an utterly shameless person, while the second, *sycophanta*, refers to a slanderer or trickster. The two words of this insult had, of course, been incorporated into Latin by the sixteenth century and it may well be that Melanchthon's choice was not made with Greek in mind.³⁵⁰ Significantly, the noun *sycophantes* has been described by one modern scholar as a 'dirty word' not just because of its own meaning but because it is frequently found in the company of other words of ill repute, as it is here used by Melanchthon; thus, Melanchthon is once again following classical precedent in his description.³⁵¹

Equally, however, and particularly in the case of the noun *sycophanta*, there is a sense that the usage is deliberate and has been chosen for its ability to express concisely and vividly Melanchthon's opinion of Tetzl. To this end, there are several

³⁴⁸ For a fuller discussion of the use of foreign and specifically Ancient Greek in humanist writings, see Erika Rummel, 'The Use of Greek in Erasmus' Letters', *Humanistica Lovaniensia*, vol. 30 (1981), 55-93

³⁴⁹ The precise etymology of this term has long been the subject of conjecture and various origins have been suggested; for further details, see A. B. Cook, 'CYKOPANTHC', *Classical Review*, 21, vol. 5 (August, 1907), 133-136 and J. O. Lofberg, *Sycophancy in Athens* (Chicago: Ares, 1976), pp. vii-xi.

³⁵⁰ *Sycophanta* was a familiar enough term by the sixteenth century; Luther uses it as a term of abuse no fewer than nine times in his letters, including twice to refer to Eck; for example, see Luther, *WA Br.*, 1, 503.22, 565.14, 568.14, and vol. 11, 285.21. Luther himself defines a sycophant as a 'ein Bösewicht, der um seins eignen Nutz und Genießes Willen Andern Schaden thut'; see Luther, *WA TR*, 4, 4491 (pp. 342-343). Melanchthon also uses the term elsewhere, again to describe Eck and some for Luther's other opponents; see *WA Br.*, 9, 246.10, and 269.8.

³⁵¹ See David Harvey, 'The sycophant and sykophancy', in *Nomos: Essays in Athenian law, politics, and society*, ed. by Paul Cartledge, Paul Millett and Stephen Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. P., 1990), pp. 107-109 (pp. 103-121).

possible references; the first is based on the notion of an informer. In ancient Attica, where the export of figs had been prohibited, those who informed on the theft of figs for illegal exports were said to reveal the figs, and were known as *sycophanta*; in accusing the robbers, the *sycophanta* gained favour by flattering the wealthy.³⁵² This meaning was certainly accepted in the sixteenth century, as evinced by its incorporation by Erasmus into the *Adagia*.³⁵³

Secondly, and derived from the word's etymology, is a vulgar gesture; in Ancient Greece, the word referred to a gesture symbolic of the vulva, which sense *sykon* also bore.³⁵⁴ Finally, the term *sycophanta* occurs in the Greek translation of the New Testament and is used in the sense of *to calumniate*, for example to attack soldiers who are tempted to make money by resorting to blackmail in Luke 3. 14, again stressing the notion of immoral earnings.³⁵⁵ Its only other occurrence describes the murmur of the crowd that became a roar when Jesus and Zacchaeus were about to enter the house in Luke 19. 8;³⁵⁶ this roar is of course perhaps the cry of Zacchaeus's own conscience at having wrongfully extorted money from the crowd, and his need to retribute it.³⁵⁷ Nevertheless, as the above indicates, whatever its etymology, the word *sycophanta* is inextricably linked both in terms of classical and

³⁵² It is with this meaning that the character of the sycophant or informer appears in Aristophanes' dramas *The Birds* and *Plutus*; in the first play, the sycophant makes his living by harassing subject states of Athens in the Athenian courts, while in the latter the sycophant claims to be a model prosecutor of public interest. In both dramas, the sycophant is mocked and driven off stage by the other characters. See Aristophanes' '*The Birds*' and '*Plutus*', *Aristophanes: Plays*, 2 vols, ed. by Patrick Dickinson (Oxford: Oxford Univ. P., 1970), II, '*The Birds*', ll. 149-1465, and '*Plutus*', ll. 851-977.

³⁵³ See the entry for 'sycophanta' in Erasmus, '*Adages*', in *Collected Works of Erasmus*, 33, trans. and ed. by Roger A. Mynors (Toronto: Toronto Univ. P., 1991), pp. 178-179.

³⁵⁴ The notion of the fig as a vulgar gesture had origins in Ancient Greece and was well-known both in Latin and in vernacular languages in the sixteenth century throughout Europe; for example, it occurs in the chapters dealing with the Popefig's Island, in François Rabelais, *Quart Livre* (Egham: Runnymede, 1990), pp. 189-220 (p. 190). For further information on the gesture, see Carl Sittl, *Die Gebärden der Griechen und Römer* (Leipzig: Taubner, 1890; 1970), p. 103, 11.1. See also Robin Osbourne, 'Vexatious litigation in classical Athens: sycophancy and the sykophant', in *Nomos: Essays in Athenian law, politics, and society*, ed. by Paul Cartledge, Paul Millett and Stephen Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. P., 1990), p. 86, n. 8 (pp. 83-102).

³⁵⁵ In the Vulgate, Luke 3. 14 is given as follows: 'Interrogabant autem eum et milites dicentes: Quid faciemus et nos? Et ait illis: Neminem concutatis, neque calumniam faciatis, et contenti estote stipendiis vestris. 'calumniam faciatis' is rendered as μηδέ συκοφαντήσητε in Greek.

³⁵⁶ Luke 19. 8 in the Vulgate reads: 'Stans autem Zacchæus, dixit ad Dominum: Ecce dimidium bonorum meorum, Domine, do pauperibus; et si quid aliquem defraudavi, reddo quadruplum. Again, 'sycophanta' is suggested in the Latin 'defraudavi' but clearly stated in the Greek translation: καὶ εἰ τινός τι ἐσυκοφάντησα ἀποδίδωμι τετραπλοῦν.

³⁵⁷ For further discussion of both these passages and the significance of the word *sycophanta* to them, see A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament: The Gospel according to Luke*, New Testament Studies, 6 vols (Nashville, TE: Broadman P., 1930-33), II, p. 57.

biblical texts with the notion of money immorally gained, and Melanchthon thereby accuses Tetzel of the same. Thus, the pun present in the word *sycophanta* allows Melanchthon to make both a direct criticism of Tetzel alongside a rather improper accusation. The exact meaning of the phrase ‘impudentissimo Sycophanta’ in the *Historia* would of course be lost on many of Melanchthon’s readers; at the same time, however, its use enables Melanchthon to conceal the sharpness of his criticism of Tetzel as well as create a sense of fraternity with those able to understand the word, that is to say his fellow humanists. In appreciating its etymology, the quality of the insult is obvious and corresponds to Erasmus’s advice on the use of Greek words to create a more vivid effect.³⁵⁸

Further uses of Greek words that had simply been long-accepted into Latin are also to be found in the *Thesenanschlag* narrative; these occur in the naming of Tetzel’s supporters as ‘monachos’ and ‘theologos’ as well as Tetzel’s own ‘sophistica’. As with the previous example, their use might well have been accidental as they had become the standard terms for their respective referents. The final example is given in Greek script and, therefore, visually dominates that section of the narrative; this example is used to describe Tetzel as *χωφών πρόσωπον*, or a ‘silent person’. While it would have been possible to construct a similar phrase in Latin, Melanchthon has again opted for Greek; this may owe something to the fact that the Greek expression is both more concise than its Latin equivalent or simply as a result of its effect as an image. A direct translation of the two words provides the impression of a speechless or dumb face; the term is obviously used ironically in light of the surrounding description of Tetzel, and thus acquires a greater comic and damning effect. Moreover, the casting of the insult in Greek script allows the insult to dominate the text physically, even if only understandable to the learned humanist.

In this way, an analysis of the context of Greek usage in the *Thesenanschlag* narrative indicates Melanchthon’s preference for Greek to express hostility and anger when offering criticism or barbed comments; in such instances, the quality of the Greek enables Melanchthon to make his point with greater force. Such usage exists not simply to demonstrate his rhetorical finesse or abundance of style, but also to share a joke more privately within the community of learned, humanist Lutherans. Finally, Melanchthon’s use of Greek in this episode in the *Historia* reflects

³⁵⁸ Desiderius Erasmus, ‘*De Utraque Verborum ac Rerum Copia*’, in *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 24, ed. and trans. by C. R. Thompson (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto P, 1978), 317: 13-14.

sixteenth-century practice and shows Melanchthon demonstrating his humanist credentials through his own written style and the use of an effective rhetorical device.³⁵⁹ As such, Melanchthon follows the advice given by Erasmus on the use of Greek in writing as well as the model of Cicero in the *Epistles*.³⁶⁰

6. Classical Influence: Genre

As has already been discussed, Melanchthon's understanding of Tetzels character reflects an iterative understanding of personality through his description of the preacher's behaviour as being 'nihil sui dissimilis'; this basic cognitive model of personality is consistent with the view of character provided by classical writings that is also to be found through to the sixteenth century and beyond.

Unsurprisingly, Melanchthon's conception of personality and its development owes much to classical thought and to views that can be traced back at least as far as Aristotle's ethical writings. For the latter, personality consisted of two different types of virtue, one of thought and the other of character; Aristotle argued that virtue of thought arose through teaching and required experience and time, while the latter resulted from habit; virtue of either form came by a process of nurture and did not arise naturally:

A state [of character] arises from [the repetition of] similar activities. Hence we must display the right activities, since differences in these imply corresponding differences in the states. It is not unimportant, then, to acquire one sort of habit or another, right from our youth; rather, it is very important, indeed all-important.³⁶¹

³⁵⁹ As Tinkler makes clear, it was a relatively common practice for Humanist authors either to place humanism-inspired lexis and rhetoric into the mouths of their characters or to adopt these themselves as a way of demonstrating their allegiance; see John F. Tinkler, 'The Rhetorical Method of Francis Bacon's *History of the Reign of King Henry VII*', *History and Theory*, 26 (vol. 1) (1987), 32-52. Perhaps the most obvious example of this is humanist dialogue where form and content are fused into the language, fitting both speaker and argument, in Erasmus, '*Ciceronianus sive de optimo dicendi genere dialogus*', in *Opera Omnia*, ed. by Pierre Mesnard (Amsterdam: North Holland, 1971), 1.2, pp. 606-710.

³⁶⁰ For a discussion of the use of Greek in Cicero's *Epistles*, see R. B. Steele, 'The Greek in Cicero's *Epistles*', *The American Journal of Philology*, vol. 21, 4 (1900), 387-410.

³⁶¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1985), 1104a, p. 35.

The stress on habituation found in Aristotle is reflected in classical biography, especially encomium, in which any account of childhood focuses on education, and its positive effects on the subject.³⁶²

In later biographical writings, however, personality is shown to be acquired both through birth as well as through experiential refinement. This modified understanding of personality is seen in Plutarch, for example, where original capacities respond to experiences and are guided into a pattern of conduct which are in turn strengthened into a stable aspect of personality.³⁶³ Tacitus, Plutarch's Roman contemporary, also indicates his belief that character was both inherited as well as shaped by experience.³⁶⁴ The focus of such classical biographies traces the subject's greatness from birth onwards, identifies his characteristics, and attempts to exploit influences and experiences; typically, classical biography individuates the subject through the unique combination of recognised characteristics.³⁶⁵

Classical understanding of human nature is dominated by essentialism, that is the theory of an object's unchanging qualities; for the ancient world, personality was fixed but unfolded from birth onwards. Hippocrates sought to explain the differences between characters, and the *Corpus Hippocraticum* (460-c. 370 B.C.) introduces the notion of temperament as influenced by the four humours and, together with Galen's writings (A.D. 130-201), this typology went on to dominate Western thinking late into the nineteenth century.³⁶⁶ Theophrastus (371-287 B.C.), one of the early contributors to the understanding of personality theory and a disciple of Aristotle, described thirty characters, common to society, based on the humours. In humourism, it was the four humours, alone and in combination, that determined one's temperament and whether one was sanguine, melancholic, choleric, or phlegmatic.³⁶⁷

³⁶² See Christopher Pelling, 'Childhood and Personality in Greek Biography', in *Plutarch and History* (London: Classical Press of Wales, 2002), pp. 301-338.

³⁶³ See Christopher Pelling, 'Aspects of Plutarch's Characterization', in Christopher Pelling, ed., *Plutarch and History*, pp. 283-300.

³⁶⁴ Tacitus, *Agricola* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1948; 1970), p. 54 and p. 51 respectively.

³⁶⁵ For further discussion of the distinction between *character* and *personality* in Greek biographical writing, see and Christopher Gill, 'The Character-Personality Distinction', in Christopher Pelling, ed., *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), pp. 1-31, and Christopher Pelling, 'Portrait (2001): Constructing Personalities: A Tale of Two Gills', in *Plutarch and History*, pp. 321-328.

³⁶⁶ For modern editions of both Hippocrates' and Galen's writings, see *Corpus medicorum Graecorum*, 34 vols (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1991-).

³⁶⁷ For further information on the development of personality theory, see Gian Vittorio Caprara and Daniel Cervone, *Personality: Determinants, Dynamics, and Potentials* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. P., 2000) pp. 30-32.

The influence of this understanding of personality reached beyond classical antiquity with little modification; Aquinas, for example, saw ‘dispositiones’ as quasi-permanent innate characteristics, that were modified and refined through experience and manifest in the individual’s behaviour.³⁶⁸ This view develops the concept of personality found in hagiography where the saint’s seemingly static character and abilities are shown to be largely fixed at birth but revealed slowly through development.³⁶⁹ Furthermore, this long-established view is found in humanist writing which even allows for the movement of planets, and thereby God, to determine the characteristics of specific social groups.³⁷⁰ Melanchthon makes his agreement with such an understanding clear in his philosophical textbook of 1549, *Initia doctrinae physicae*:

Nee tantum valetudinis signa sunt illustria in stellis, sed etiam inclinationum foelicium aut infoelicium in artibus, aut aliis actionibus, quae naturae hominum familiares sunt, ut in adsequendis fastigiis honorum, in praeliando, in periculis vitae. Musici, poetae, oratores fiunt canori, dulces, splendidi, quibus foeliciter positi sunt Sol, Luna, Venus, Mercurius. Econtra horridi et amusi, qui a Saturno et a Marte impediuntur. Quod igitur Stigelio scribenti carmen verba splendidiora, figurae venustiores, numeri dulciores, quasi sponte se offerunt, Ursino viro docto et maiore studio quaerenti, non se similia offerunt, dicimus fortunam esse... Multa gubernat natura, non omnia. Nec Deus removendus est a gubernatione propter astra, sed vere statuendum, multas inclinationes ab astris ortas, Deum moderari, et orandum, ut bonas iuvet, et reprimat malas.³⁷¹

³⁶⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, trans. and ed. by W. D. Hughes (London: Blackfriars, 1969), 1a2ae, Q. 55.1.

³⁶⁹ See James A. Schultz, *The Knowledge of Childhood in the German Middle Ages: 1100-1350*, Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania P., 1995), pp. 187-196.

³⁷⁰ ‘People’s skills and characters are also allotted according to the planets. Saturn governs old men, monks, those given to depression, hidden treasures and those things which once acquires with difficulty and by means of long journeys. Jupiter has control over members of religious Orders, prelates, Kings, Dukes and material profit lawfully gained. Mars governs bakers, millers, soldieries and those who are everywhere called ‘the sons of Mars’.’ Cornelius Agrippa, *De Occulta Philosophia* (1510; princeps 1531), partially quoted and translated by Peter Maxwell-Stuart, ed., *The Occult in Early-Modern Europe: A Documentary History* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 96-97.

³⁷¹ Philip Melanchthon, ‘De Temperamentiis et Stellis’, in ‘*Initia doctrinae physicae*’ (Wittenberg: Haeredes Johannes Cratonis, 1585), in *CR*, XIII, 179-412, (325).

Melanchthon's understanding of personality is, therefore, one that inherited much from established thought; for him, a child's physical characteristics were largely passed on from parents while being at least partly governed by astrology and God in turn.

His understanding of Tetzel's character is consistent with his understanding of the development of Luther's personality found elsewhere in the *Historia*; significantly, this conception is one that is anchored in a durable classical tradition. Furthermore, it is important that in depicting Tetzel, Melanchthon offers a further criticism of the Catholic Church as any demonstration of poor behaviour on Tetzel's part logically indicates a poor model as well as subsequent poor emulation: in effect, Melanchthon argues, Tetzel has simply repeated the poor behaviour and actions that one might have expected from a corrupt Catholic Church and any of its products.

While this essentially iterative understanding of personality is demonstrated in the depiction of Tetzel, it is more fully evinced in the representation of Luther's character which even in the narrative of the posting of the Theses displays a basic psychological paradigm found in many classical and humanist narrative forms of biographical writing.

In order to appreciate the depth of Melanchthon's depiction of Luther's character, it is necessary to acknowledge both the psychological framework within which Melanchthon is working as well the consistency of Luther's representation within the *Historia* in which the *Thesenanschlag* represents an important but, here, decontextualised part.

Classical rhetoric provides three basic genera for life writing:³⁷² the demonstrative genre; the deliberative genre; and the judicial genre. Unsurprisingly, the latter was the preferred genre for the representation of legal speeches while the deliberative genre sought to provide the reader or audience with advice, and was the natural choice for the representation of political speeches. The demonstrative, or epideictic, genre was originally a ceremonial genre of oratory, especially used at funerals, and offered a mixture of praise or censure of its subject. As has been suggested, Renaissance biography was not primarily concerned with political or

³⁷² While many classical authors write on rhetoric and biographical topics, Cicero's *De inventione* and his *Partitiones oratoriae* provide clear indications of classical trends that were followed well into the early-modern period, as does the anonymous text *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. See Cicero, *De inventione* (London: Heinemann, 1954-65), and *Ad. C. Herennium: De Ratione dicendi*, ed. and trans. by Henry Caplan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. P., 1954).

judicial narratives and adopted instead the demonstrative or epideictic narrative as its principal model of life writing, concerned as it is with the praise or censure of an individual and his life. In adopting such a genre as a narrative model, classical rhetoric enables the author to identify *loci* to find arguments for his biography. Given the nature of the *Historia* and its desire ‘to do honour’ to Luther,³⁷³ Melanchthon draws on the demonstrative genre for the structure of his narrative.

The demonstrative genre suggests three basic *loci* to structure the narrative: *corpus*; *res externae*; and *animus*.³⁷⁴ Unsurprisingly, *corpus* requires a description of the subject’s physical attributes and may include a discussion of health, beauty, strength and speed, while the *res externae* describe the subject’s fatherland, ancestry, relatives, wealth, public honour and power; the combination of the subject’s *corpus* and *res externae* provide his external attributes rather than any internal analysis and are grouped under the term *fortuna*. The final *locus*, *animus*, calls for this psychological treatment of the subject’s prudence, justice, courage and temperance, or the four cardinal virtues of the classical world.³⁷⁵ The interplay between *animus* and *fortuna* is the basic interest and focus of the demonstrative genre; through an analysis of how the subject’s natural attributes and the way in which he uses them relate, the classical author hopes to demonstrate virtue in his subject’s life; thus, the basic concern of classical and humanist biography is character revealed by the interaction of gifts and circumstance with nature.

From the very beginning, the *Historia* reveals an awareness of the *loci* of the demonstrative genre; unsurprisingly, the narrative does not deal with all the *loci* provided by classical biography, but selects those which will allow Luther’s qualities to emerge more forcefully and which will, in turn, demonstrate his *nobility* of character more clearly. The characteristics and attributes required by the *loci* are not always directly observed in Luther, but they are shown to be an essential part of his nature through kinship and familial inheritance.

³⁷³ Tinkler, p. 36.

³⁷⁴ ‘Praises and vituperations will be taken from the topics of attributes of persons which we have spoken of elsewhere. Anyone who wants to treat this in a more orderly fashion, can divide them into spirit [*animus*] and body [*corpus*] and external things [*externae res*]. The topic of spirit is virtue, the parts of which we discussed elsewhere; the topics of body are health, beauty, strength, speed. External things are public honour, money, relations by marriage, ancestry, friends, fatherland, power, and other similar things that are understood to be in this class. And what holds good in all things is also necessary here: the natures and qualities of the contraries will be understood.’ Cicero, *De inventione* (London: Heinemann, 1954-65), II, 59 and 177.

³⁷⁵ *De Inventione*, 2.51.156 and 2.51.159-165.

Luther's character is a well-developed entity in the *Historia* by the point at which the posting of the theses is described; Melanchthon has introduced the reader to Luther's background in the description of his childhood, adolescence, and education. Significantly, those characteristics that Luther is shown to possess in these earlier episodes of the *Historia*'s narrative correspond to the *loci* provided by Cicero's *De Inventione* and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. Fulfilling Cicero's requirements, Luther's *corpus* is given sufficient treatment in the description of the subject's health and physical strength, or *corpus valetudo et vires*; this portrayal occurs in the depiction of Luther's life in the monastery:

Erat autem natura, quod saepe miratus sum, in corpore nec parvo nec imbecilli, valde modici cibi et potus, vidi continuis quatuor diebus, cum quidem recte valeret, prorsus nihil edentem aut bibentem, vidi saepe alias multis diebus quotidie exiguo pane et halece contentum esse. (Avii^v)

As has been identified elsewhere,³⁷⁶ this passage not only respects generic requirements, but also suggests Luther's saintly qualities. The strength described here is not that of the warrior but one that is perhaps more appropriate to the scholar and reformer, and indicates Luther's ability to endure hardship in his search for piety. Similarly, a case might also be made for the *locus* of speed, or *velocitas* in the description of Luther's swiftness of intellect and skill in debate; while Luther's sporting prowess is not considered by the *Historia*, Melanchthon certainly does indicate clearly Luther's mental and intellectual capabilities, specifically in the terms of how Luther's intelligence and learning allowed him to overtake his peers at school quickly:

[...] vis ingenii acerrima esset, et imprimis ad eloquentiam idonea, celeriter aequalibus suis praecurret, et verbis et copia sermonis in loquendo, et in scribenda soluta oratione, et in Versibus coeteros adolescentes, qui una discebant, facile vicit... Sed incidit Erfordiae in eius aetatis Dialecticen satis spinosam, quam cum sagacitate ingenii

³⁷⁶ See chapter 3 of this thesis, 'Childhood', p. 100

praeceptionum causas et fontes melius quam coeteri perspiceret, cito arripuit. (Avi^v)

This identification of prodigious talent has numerous hagiographical and humanist precedents that clearly situate it as a generic trope; it was a familiar and established aspect of saints' lives in mediaeval German hagiography,³⁷⁷ and was later to be found in humanist writings. Erasmus, for example, describes Colet in similar terms in a letter to Jodocus Jonas.³⁷⁸

Melanchthon follows the precepts provided by classical biography in following the *loci* of the *res externae*; these external aspects are also dealt with prior to the posting of the theses and serve to establish the nature of Luther more closely before his first great test. *Patria*, or fatherland, is indicated early in the *Historia* when Melanchthon stresses Luther's credentials as the latest member of a long-established family, located in the very heart of Mansfeld. This locating of Luther begins a narrative of Luther's ancestry, *genus*, which in turn provides insights into Luther's character; through an understanding of Luther's father, mother and his whole ancestry, the reader is able to see how Luther's character embodies a noble and honest tradition established by the Luthers for generations.³⁷⁹ What is important here is that the characteristics his family is shown to possess are: moderation (paternal family); judgement (father); integrity (father); honesty (mother and maternal family); God-fearing (mother); piety (mother); honesty and decency (brother). The implications of the narrative are clear in suggesting that Luther has inherited all the characteristics held by his family both near and distant, and the truth of the representation of Luther is supported by the presence of such qualities in his family. This understanding of character development is consistent with late-medieval

³⁷⁷ For example, there are clear parallels between the depiction of Luther here and Dominic in the thirteenth-century *Passional* in which the young saint is shown to excel in biblical study as well as having a precocious taste for ascetism which manifests itself in his desire to sleep on the floor along with his heart, mind, and reason being drawn totally to God; see *Das Passional: Eine Legenden-Sammlung des dreizehnten Jahrhunderts*, ed. Fr. Karl Köpke, Bibliothek der gesammten deutschen National-Literatur, 32 (Quedlinburg: Basse, 1852), 66-67 and 83-87. See also Schultz's discussion of childhood qualities in mediaeval German narrative in 'Genres: Different Children's Stories', in James A. Schultz, *The Knowledge of Childhood in the German Middle Ages: 1100-1350*, Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania P., 1995), pp. 174-198.

³⁷⁸ Erasmus's description of Colet is to be found in his letter to Jodocus Jonas of 13 June 1521, in P. S. Allen, ed., *Opus epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. P., 1906-1958), IV, 507-27.

³⁷⁹ For a fuller discussion of the representation of Luther's lineage, see chapter 3 of this thesis, 'Childhood', pp. 84-85.

theories of personality, and Melanchthon acknowledges this in several places.³⁸⁰ While friends occur little in the narrative, Luther's friendship is included in this earlier part of the narrative and functions in a similar way to that of his family, namely to testify through association to Luther's character. Luther's friends are shown to be individuals of great talent, such as Johannes Reineck or Dr Martin Mellerstadt and Staupitz;³⁸¹ the individuals named with whom Luther's 'spends' the greatest amount of time, however, are either classical authors or the Church Fathers. Thus, the relationship with such names as Cicero, Virgil, Livy, Augustine, Biel, D'Ailly, Occam, Gerson highlight not only Luther's learning but also his humanist and theological credentials; in this context, it is significant that Luther is first exposed to the classics and only subsequently to religious texts, reinforcing Melanchthon's view of the primacy of humanist learning and scholarship to religious education and truth. Nevertheless, it must be indicated that this slow revelation of biblical texts may represent another narrative rectification by Melanchthon to support the humanist cause.³⁸² The remaining *loci* provided by classical biography are ignored either at this stage in the narrative or altogether, which in turn simply reflects the flexibility of the genre.

Having demonstrated the external nature of Luther's character, the narrative moves towards a discussion of his inner personality and the subject of his *animus*; this is not done, however, through simple description but through exemplification in the narrative of the *Thesenanschlag*. It is in the posting of the ninety-five theses that the reader witnesses all four *loci* of the *animus* as well as the combination of Luther's character and education in his defence of theological truth; this depiction is carried out partly through comment as well as mimetic representation. First, the passage recalls various characteristics through repetition of vocabulary, already familiar from the earlier description of Luther or his family: Luther is once again cast as pious, 'studio pietatis ardens', and is seen in stark contrast to Tetzl who appears almost without reason and brandishing thunderbolts, 'sed fulmina in Lutherum

³⁸⁰ For Melanchthon's understanding of character development see Philip Melanchthon, *Initia doctrinae physicae* (Wittenberg: Haeredes Johannes Cratonis, 1585), in *CR*, XIII, 179-412, (325).

³⁸¹ While Mellerstadt and Staupitz were not technically humanists, they were known to be open to the humanist cause as well as being noted for their reflective attitude; see Lewis W. Spitz, 'The Course of German Humanism', in *Itinerarium Italicum*, ed. by Thomas A. Brady and Heiko A. Oberman, *Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought*, 14 (Leiden: Brill, 1975), pp. 371-435 (p. 415).

³⁸² Erasmus identifies the same experience in Colet's life, suggesting its status as a stock humanist trope; see his letter to Jonas of 13 June 1521, in P. S. Allen, ed., *Opus epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. P., 1906-1958), IV, 507-27.

torquet'. Against this crazed figure, Luther emerges as a calm and rational figure who publishes his response to Tetzel and who later is forced into debating the issues to preserve the truth, 'Hi furores Tecelii et eius Satellitum imponunt necessitatem Luthero de rebus iisdem copiosius disserendi, et tuendae veritatis'. The effect of this is clearly one of "whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad". It is significant that Luther must confront Tetzel in debate, the branch of learning in which he has always excelled according to the *Historia*.³⁸³ Thus, it is self-control, or *temperantia*, and wisdom, *sapientia*, that define the Luther of the *Thesenanschlag* passage, and again classical-humanist characteristics and education are seen to vanquish scholastic madness.

The necessity of Luther's posting of the theses also marks a connection with the parallel deliberative genre; as Tinkler indicates,³⁸⁴ clear boundaries were not marked between the three basic genera of life writing, and in the passage describing the posting of the Theses, Melanchthon raises a fundamental topic of the *genus deliberativum*, namely the questions of *utilitas* and *honestas*. Cicero makes clear that in giving political advice it is possible to argue that a course of action is a matter of honour or to identify the advantages available;³⁸⁵ there are obvious gains to arguing that a subject's action is both honourable and expedient as it enables the author to exculpate the subject of any responsibility, and the argument functions as a narrative wild card to justify an action without debating whether it should happen or not. Thus, in arguing that the *Thesenanschlag* was necessary, Melanchthon not only follows the classical precedent but importantly elides any discussion as to whether it should have taken place, thereby casting Luther as the involuntary agent of change rather than the active rebel.

Significantly, the use of the noun *necessitas* calls to the mind Luther's description of his vow to become a monk as a 'coactum et necessarium votum'.³⁸⁶

³⁸³ See *Historia*, Av^v-Avi^r.

³⁸⁴ Tinkler, p. 42.

³⁸⁵ 'cum autem ita necesse erit, si aliquid effugere aut adipisci elimus, tum adiunctio illa quid habeat utilitatis aut quid honestatis, erit considerandum. Nam si velis attendere, ita tamen, ut id quaeras, quod conveniat ad usum civitatis, reperiatis nullam esse rem, quam facere necesse sit, nisi propter aliquam causam, quam adiunctionem nominamus; pariter autem esse multas res [necessitatis], ad quas similis adiunctio non accedit; quod genus "[ut] homines [mortales] necesse est interire", sine adiunctione; ut cibo utantur, non necesse est nisi cum illa exceptione "extra quam si nolint fame perire".' Cicero, *De Inventione*, (London: Heinemann, 1954-65), II, 172.

³⁸⁶ 'Neque enim libens et cupiens fiebam monachus, multo minus vero ventris gratia, sed terrore et agone mortis subitae circumvallatus vovi coactum et necessarium votum.' Luther, *De votis monasticis*, WA, VIII, 1889, 573.31 – 574.1.

While the Stotternheim vow is curiously absent from Melanchthon's narrative,³⁸⁷ it was a familiar part of the already developing *Lutherbild*; Luther himself refers to the episode in the preface to his 1521 work on monastic vows³⁸⁸ as well as in a *Tischrede* from 1539,³⁸⁹ and it was included in Mathesius's sermons.³⁹⁰ At the time, the necessity and the divine agency of the vow were acknowledged by others, if not by Luther.³⁹¹ By linking the two episodes lexically, Melanchthon places the authority for the posting of the theses at a divine level, thereby reinforcing his interpretation of Luther's status as a divine messenger found in the funeral oration.³⁹²

Moreover, Luther is seen through his actions to embody the virtue of *fortitudo*, bearing Tetzel's abuse patiently in an attempt to preach the truth. Melanchthon goes on to say that Luther, far from wishing to upturn the Church's practices, urged moderation, again a significant aspect of the *animus loci* as well as of humanist ideals:

Haec initia fuerunt huius controversiae, in qua Lutherus nihil adhuc
suspicans aut somnians de futura mutatione rituum, ne quidem ipsas
Indulgentias prorsus abiiciebat, sed tantum moderationem flagitabat.
(Bii^r-Biii^v)

³⁸⁷ See the discussion of the episode's absence in chapter 4 of this thesis, 'Monasticism', pp. 124-125.

³⁸⁸ See *De votis monasticis Martini Lutheri iudicium* (1521): 'neque enim libens et cupiens fiebam monachus, multo minus vero ventris gratia, sed terrore et agone mortis subitae circumvallatus vovi coactum et necessarium votum'. Luther, *WA*, VIII, 564-669 (574).

³⁸⁹ '16. Julii, in die Alexii, dicebat: Heute ist die jerige zeit, do ich in das kloster zu Erfurt gezogen. – Et incipiebat recitare historiam, quomodo vovisset votum, nam cum fuisset vix 14 diebus ante in itinere et fulmine prope Stotternheim non longe ab Erphordia ita consternatus, ut in terrore dixisset: Hilff du, S. Anna, ich wil ein monch werden.' Luther, *WA Tr*, IV, 1916, Nr. 4707, 440.5-15.

³⁹⁰ 'Am ende dis jars [1505], dam im sein gut gesell erstochen und ein grosses wetter und gewelicher donnerschlag in hart erschrecket, und er sich ernstlich vor Gottes zorn und dem Jüngsten gerichte entsetzet, beschleust er bey sich selbs unnd thut ein gelübde, er wölle ins Kloster gehen, Gott allda dienen und in mit Messhalten versoenen und die ewige seligkeyt mit Klösterlicher heiligkeyt erwerben, wie denn solches eygentlich der frömbsten Klosterleut lehr und gedanken war.' Johannes Mathesius, *Historien von des Ehrwürdigen in Gott Seligen thewren Manns Gottes Doctoris Martini Luthers anfang, lehr, leben vnd sterben* (Nürnberg, 1566), in *Johannes Mathesius: Ausgewählte Werke*, III, ed. by G. Loesche (Prag: Calve, 1906), p. 20.

³⁹¹ See, for example, the letter to Luther from Crotus Rubianus of 31 October 1519: '[A]d haec respexit divina providentia, quando te redeuntem a parentibus coeleste fulmen veluti alterum Paulum ante oppidum Erfurdianum in terram postravit atque intra Augustiniana septa compulit e nostra consortio tristissimo tuo discessu.' Luther, *WA Br.*, 1, 213, 543.106-109.

³⁹² Philip Melanchthon, *Oratio uber der Leich des Ehrwürdigen herrn D. Martini Luthers* (Wittenberg: G. Rhaw, 1546), A4.

Finally, the *Thesenanschlag* passage shows Luther acting for the common good not for his own personal gain, and thus depicts the virtue of *iustitia*. In this way, Melanchthon creates an image of Luther in the potentially most important episode of his biography as the physical embodiment of the four cardinal virtues, representing humanist teachings as well as those of the Church Fathers.³⁹³ This combination of classical and biblical teachings highlights the humanist agenda present throughout the *Historia*, and sees Luther bringing together the Ciceronian ideals of *honestas* and *utilitas*, as well as *animus* and *fortuna*.

The very fact that the *loci* of the classical tradition can so easily be identified in the *Historia* indicates that the representation was subject to the constraints of a generic tradition; in following the precepts provided by Cicero *et al*, Melanchthon has selected his data and tailored his interpretation to fit the requirements of the genre. While the possibility of a *true* depiction was inevitably impossible, this analysis shows how the *truth* was subject to Melanchthon's authorizing of the text and how his own classical education determined his conceptual framework, and in turn the narrative outcome that has been subsequently accepted and repeated for centuries.

7. Concluding Remarks

It has been argued that the first Reformation jubilee celebrations in 1617 marked a major stage in the development of European historical consciousness;³⁹⁴ with the advent of an officially sanctioned and scrutinized celebration, religious and political authorities intervened in events to provide exemplary instruction for contemporary society. This celebration sought to create an orthodox representation of the past, thereby transforming simple chronology into narrative history; this general development from chronology to a distinctly narrative-historical understanding was

³⁹³ The four virtues have their origins in the writings of Plato who, importantly, adds piety to the group, but were later adapted by Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas and then incorporated into Christian teaching. For further information on the four virtues, see Plato, *Protagoras*, ed. by C. C. W. Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 330b; Augustine, 'Of the Morals of the Catholic Church', 'De moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae', in *The Catholic and Manichaeian Ways of Life*, ed. and trans. by D.A. Gallagher and I.J. Gallagher (Washington, DC: Catholic Univ. of America P., 1966), pp. 22-23; and St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 19 vols (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1911-25), II(I).61.

³⁹⁴ See Charles Zika, pp. 197-199.

ultimately based on Melanchthon's dating of the *Thesenanschlag* given in the *Historia*.

As far as this discussion is concerned, it is immaterial whether the truth behind Luther's posting of the Ninety-Five Theses can ever be ascertained or not; regardless of the outcome of the question, the 31 October will most likely always be marked as the beginning of the Reformation. In terms of the depiction of Luther, however, the posting of the theses is of the utmost importance. If they were posted, as Melanchthon describes, the theses imply a deliberate act that suggests intent; by creating the narrative episode that shows the posting of the theses, Melanchthon stresses Luther's self-determined desire to reform the Church and Luther's own role in his destiny. On a structural, lexical and interpretative level, the use of rhetorical strategies present in the episode conform to humanist practice,³⁹⁵ integrating style to guide the reader explicitly and implicitly toward Melanchthon's interpretation of Luther, and thereby lending the narrative colour, force and elegance to move the reader in its persuasive instruction. The narrative and rhetorical strategies at work in Melanchthon's account indicate that the event is a crucial narrative episode in early Lutheran identity that shows Luther's intervention in the history of the Church, but significantly this intervention is neither gratuitous nor aggressive on Luther's part, but rather responds to external action. Therefore, whatever inaccuracies are present in the representation, they are at least narratively justified, and Melanchthon tailors his image of Luther in this initial phase of his adulthood narrative to form the major act of the *Historia* and one which marks the beginning of Luther's adulthood and ministry as a reformer, placing history in the service of narrative.

The episode of the posting of the Ninety-Five Theses has been depicted over and over again in these terms, and this depiction is a result of the narrative account authorized by Melanchthon. As such, the influence of Melanchthon's account of the *Thesenanschlag* is highly significant, given the narrative similarities between his representation and those found in histories of the Reformation and biographies of Luther, particularly in the Protestant tradition, and as historians acknowledge, it is

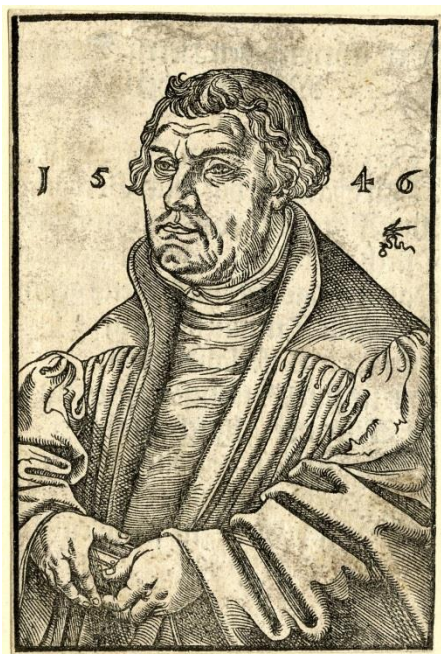
³⁹⁵ Hannah H. Gray, 'Renaissance Humanism: The Pursuit of Eloquence', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 24, vol. 4 (1963), 497-514 (p. 511).

this significance that has been crucial to an understanding of the *Lutherbild* ever since.³⁹⁶

³⁹⁶ One recent survey of the question as to whether the theses were posted concludes: 'In the absence of indisputable historical testimony, whether one thinks that Luther posted the theses or not remains, rather fittingly, a matter of faith. And it concerns more than just what happened one day in October. Determining proof one way or the other raises a number of important issues relating to the origins of the Reformation, not the least of which is the state of Luther's thinking when he sent off the letter to Albrecht. And yet for all the broader implications that might be abstracted from the minutiae of customs and dates, for many historians the most difficult aspect of the whole debate is to rid their minds of the image of Luther standing alone before the church door on that October day hammering up his theses. I suspect even the most iron-cast of externalists would agree that the vision of a university beadle going from church door to church through the narrow streets of Wittenberg is a pale substitute for Luther's defiant stand. Turning points in history seem easier to comprehend when they can be traced back to acts of heroic individualism, and for centuries the dramatic spectacle of Luther positing the theses has helped Reformation historians comprehend the event.' See C. Scott Dixon, *Contesting the Reformation, Contesting the Past* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), p. 207.

Chapter Six:

Luther after 1517



This final analysis of Melanchthon's *Historia* focuses on the years from the posting of the Ninety-five Theses in 1517 until Luther's death in 1546; unsurprisingly, these years represent a significant period in Luther's life, both temporally and in terms of events, and accordingly are given significant treatment in the *Historia*. In his account, Melanchthon is keen to create an image of Luther as the archetypal, dutiful, and pious Christian, and a fitting example for the beginning of the Reformation movement. This study explores the representation of Luther in this period to establish how Melanchthon's narrative defines his hero which in turn has authored the historical understanding of Luther to this day.

1. Introduction

The period 1517 to 1546 represents not only half of Luther's life but arguably the most significant years for the development of the Reformation and Luther's contribution to it.³⁹⁷ This period witnessed the Diet of Augsburg, the Peasants' Revolt, the Peasants' War, the Diet of Worms, the Schmalkaldic League Wars, and, in 1545, the Council of Trent. In Luther's personal life, these years saw him condemned by the Universities of Cologne and Louvain, excommunicated, hidden in the Wartburg, his translation of the Bible, his marriage, the birth of his children, and the development of his position in Wittenberg from professor-monk to the leader of a new religious movement.

The second half of Luther's life may be seen, therefore, as the most significant and engaging period in Luther's life; Melanchthon appropriately devotes just under half of the *Historia* narrative to it but excludes these episodes to offer a description of Luther's theological significance, his position in church history, and his legacy.

Nevertheless, despite the range of external events occurring in this period and the narrative space available, the account may appear at first glance somewhat empty and lacking both in description and in comment, especially when viewed against the backdrop of political and social instability of the Reformation at its most vulnerable.³⁹⁸ However, a more careful reading of Melanchthon's description of the last thirty years of Luther's life reveals much; in the first instance, it confirms the hagiographical model established earlier in the *Historia* while developing the characterisation of Luther as the unwilling but necessary antidote to Roman Catholic corruption. Secondly, the text seeks to locate Luther as the culmination of Church history: the latest figure in a line of witnesses to the true faith. Finally, the narrative confirms its humanist pedigree in its depiction of Luther and Frederick the Wise, and its call for *moderatio* while making clear that humanist education is necessary for the creation of true faith and piety, which in turn guarantees social order.

³⁹⁷ A brief survey of Luther's published works clearly shows that the period from 1520 to 1546 represents the period in which Luther was at his most prolific and produced all the major writings that shaped the early Lutheran Church with the exception of the Ninety Five Theses. Recent scholarship on Luther's theological development sees the genesis of a truly 'Reformation' thinking on the question of justification from the years following the Indulgences' controversy; for example, see Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation* (Oxford: OUP, 1991; 2012), p. 117.

³⁹⁸ Spielvogel offers a succinct overview of the events of this period in Jackson Spielvogel, *Western Civilization since 1300* (Boston, MA: Wadsworth, 2009; 2011; 2012), pp. 424-426.

In this way, the depiction of Luther's adulthood after 1517 in the *Historia* offers a consistent biography of Luther as the reformed and humanism-inspired 'saint' who in turn serves as the exemplary model for subsequent generations of Lutherans.

2. Précis

While any division of the *Historia* into sections is a retrospective, redactive exercise, and not one necessarily desired by the author, if a division is drawn after the text dealing with the posting of the Ninety-Five Theses, the final section of the *Historia* reveals a shift from a chronological, developmental narrative to a topical analysis offering significantly fewer historical data. In the first instance, this may be a consequence of the absence of the clear, narrative episodes present or perhaps created in Luther's earlier life, but the years 1517 to 1546 do represent half of Luther's life and, appropriately, half of the narrative in terms of length as well as wealth of episodes that might have been included. Indeed, this simple, and perhaps negligent, account is remarkable in part for what it leaves out as for what it puts in; Melancthon carefully selects his material to achieve a clear aim, and to articulate directly and indirectly a distinct view of Luther and his contribution.

While singular events do provide a clear focus to the text, the abandonment of an annalistic approach cannot be explained by the simple absence of such informative and narrative-forming events. Rather, the shift allows Melancthon to economize his narrative and pursue a topical assessment of Luther's larger significance and contribution to the Reformation, while revealing Melancthon's awareness that Luther's later life, especially after 1521, had the potential to overwhelm the text with material.³⁹⁹ Melancthon's emplotment of Luther's life as episode-rich until 1517 casts the early years as formative and preparatory to the Indulgences' controversy and Luther's heroic stand, and importantly it is

³⁹⁹ A simple comparative reading of these years in Luther's life in the accounts of Cochlaeus, Spangenberg, or Mathesius indicates this danger in practice; see Johannes Cochlaeus, *Commentaria Ioannis Cochlaei de Actis et Scriptis Martini Lutheri Saxonis* (Mainz : F. Behem, 1549); Cyriacus Spangenberg, 'Die Lutherpredigten', in *Doctor Martin Luther als Treckejunge; Eine Bergmannspredigt von M. Cyriacus Spangenberg*, ed. by Heinrich Rembe (Eisleben: Winkler, 1887); and Johannes Mathesius, *Historien von des Ehrwürdigen in Gott Seligen thewren Manns Gottes Doctoris Martini Luthers anfang, lehr, leben und sterben* (Nürnberg: Ulrich Neuber, 1566), in Johannes Mathesius: *Ausgewählte Werke*, III, ed. by G. Loesche (Prague: Calwe, 1906).

Melanchthon's emplotment that has been repeated consistently in subsequent narratives.

Significantly, the topical approach employed by Melanchthon in this part of the text enables him to avoid several complex issues with summary judgements and simple instructions to read Luther's writings, thereby granting Luther a literary after-life. As will be later shown, this selective approach reflects Melanchthon's irenic desire to render his protagonist palatable not only to his Protestant audience but also a humanist, Catholic, and imperialist readership; by avoiding contentious episodes, Melanchthon is able to avoid conflict.

This final section of the *Historia* may in turn be divided into three clear parts: the narrative opens with a discussion of Luther's theological significance, initially via a flattering portrait of Frederick the Wise as the true Renaissance prince and a ruler who seeks learned counsel while encouraging Luther to moderation. Despite this plea, itself suggestive of a combative Luther, the reformer is cast as desirous of tranquillity and one who is unwillingly drawn into controversy as an act of necessity, while his opponents are shown to be both uneducated and impious. In a representation which might have surprised some of Luther's closer contemporaries, Melanchthon describes his friend as one who avoids conflict. In the second section of the narrative, Melanchthon once again articulates his understanding of Luther's place in church history: Luther is depicted as the re-discoverer of truth who acts out of necessity, effectively a divine instrument called into action. Simultaneously, Luther acquires the status of the arch-Lutheran and that of a prophet – the latest figure in a long line of true believers and reformers. Thus, Melanchthon draws on common tropes and idioms of poison and purity. This depiction of Luther as the latest figure in the *catalogus testium veritatis* is consistent with the earlier text and views repeated by Melanchthon elsewhere as well as echoed by others.⁴⁰⁰

Melanchthon offers a view of Church history, contiguous with his earlier representation of the Lutheran Church not representing an innovation but rather a proper continuation of piety and purity, a correction to the sins of the Catholic

⁴⁰⁰ See, for example, the description found in Melanchthon's funeral oration for Luther in which he latter is accorded a place among the prophets, apostles and teachers of the Church and casts him as a 'salutary instrument of God', and exhorts his congregation to regard him with Jeremiah, John the Baptist, and Paul. See Melanchthon *Oratio funere in reverendi viri D. Martini Lutheri* (Wittenberg: Georg Rhau, 1546), reproduced in *CR*, VI, 59, as well as Flacius Illyricus, *Catalogus testium veritatis* (Leiden/Lyon: Candinus, 1556).

Church. Thus, this section of the *Historia* seeks to locate Luther, and the Protestant movement, not just in history but as the culmination of history, thereby establishing the validity of the movement and its founder.

In the third and final section, the *Historia* comes to an abrupt end in 1546 with a narrative devoid, somewhat curiously perhaps, of the expected death scene which hagiographical and Renaissance biographical practice might lead one to expect; Melanchthon chooses to foreground instead Luther's monument of teachings and writings, a legacy Melanchthon would have us understand, that will live on without Luther's person. The narrative closes with a truly Melanchthonian creation: Luther as the archetypal Lutheran, pious and dutiful unto death, a paradigm for Melanchthon's reader, subsequent generations of readers, and, importantly, biographers.

3. Renaissance Patron

Given the well-documented and accepted rôle of Frederick the Wise during the Reformation's infancy,⁴⁰¹ it is hardly surprising that he and his successor should feature in the *Historia*. Significantly, his appearance allows Melanchthon not only to address key questions affecting the Reformation, but also to tie his narrative idiomatically to the literary traditions of Renaissance, humanist biography.

Classical life-writing had long provided a model of patronal panegyric in which the subject receives almost inexpressible praise; indeed, this inexpressible quality emerges as a topos of both Greek and Latin life-writing as well as later medieval βίοι.⁴⁰² From the time of Constantine onwards, intellectual culture attains the highest excellence in its praise of an emperor.⁴⁰³ It is, therefore, entirely fitting that the depiction of Frederick the Wise should conform to the ideal of the *imperator literatus*. For Melanchthon, Frederick's wisdom lies ultimately in his combination of piety and learning, a clearly humanist-inspired emphasis and one which in turn supports Melanchthon's own humanist agenda.

⁴⁰¹ Borkowsky provides greater treatment of Frederick the Wise's attitude towards the Roman Church both before and after the Reformation had begun; see Ernst Borkowsky, *Das Leben Friedrichs des Weisen: Kurfürsten zu Sachsen* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1929), pp. 56–57.

⁴⁰² See Richard Laqueur, *Probleme der Spätantike: Vorträge auf dem 17. Deutschen Historikertag gehalten von Richard Laqueur, Herbert Koch, Wilhelm Weber* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1930), pp. 7 and 25.

⁴⁰³ See, for example, Julian's panegyric on Constantine, in Julian the Apostate, *Works*, ed. and transl. by W. C. Wright, 3 vols (London; Cambridge, MA: Loeb/Heinemann, 1913–23), vol. 1 and 2.

In the *Historia*, Frederick the Wise appears immediately following the episode of the Ninety-Five Theses when he laments the troubles caused by their posting; to this, Melanchthon adds Frederick as the ruler ‘most fond of public tranquility’, ‘least selfish’, and ‘especially accustomed ...to the well-being of the world’:

Cum unus omnium nostrae aetatis Principum Fridericus et tranquillitatis publicae amantissimus fuerit, et minime pleonektikos, maximeque solitus sit referre consilia ad communem salutem orbis terrarum, ut ex multis rebus intellegi potest, nec incitator Luthero, nec adplausor fuit, suumque dolorem saepe significavit, quem assidue circumtulit, metuens discordias maiores.
[Biii^v]

Such a depiction functions as standard *topoi* of the genre and is commonly found in other writings; indeed, Melanchthon describes Henry VIII similarly in the preface to the 1535 edition of the *Loci communes*, in which Melanchthon draws an explicit comparison between the ruler’s virtues and the resulting good kingdom.⁴⁰⁴ The characteristics Melanchthon admires in Henry are equally present in Frederick, namely learning, a sense of justice, a love of peace, greatness of soul, piety, a zeal for true religion, and clemency. The understanding that such fine qualities in a king resulted in a good kingdom, which in turn produced good order, were anchored in Christian and biblical tradition, in which rulers were seen as the guardians of the Church.⁴⁰⁵

However, this highly irenic depiction of Frederick the Wise is not just simple flattery. Given Melanchthon’s understanding of inherited character,⁴⁰⁶ it is reasonable to assume that Melanchthon would have his reader transfer any praise of Frederick’s virtues to Frederick’s nephew, the contemporary ruler in 1546, John Frederick. While the latter was clearly a supporter of the Lutheran cause,⁴⁰⁷ the

⁴⁰⁴ For a discussion of the role of the magistrate, see Melanchthon, ‘De magistratibus’, in *Loci communes* (1521), in *CR*, XXI, pp. 223-225. Witte offers an examination of the implications of Melanchthon’s thoughts on secular authority and its role in John Witte Jr, ‘Perhaps Jurists are good Christians after all: Lutheran theories of law, politics, and society’, in *Law and Protestantism: Legal Teachings of the Lutheran Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. P., 2002), pp. 121-140.

⁴⁰⁵ See, for example, Isaiah 49. 23.

⁴⁰⁶ See the earlier depiction of Luther’s childhood and education in the *Historia*, Av^r-Avii^v, and chapter 3 of this thesis, pp. 71-104.

⁴⁰⁷ John Frederick had been educated by Spalatin and was devoted to the teachings of Luther. He had accompanied his father to the Diet of Augsburg and signed the Confession. He became sole ruler of

success or failure of reform had been in the hands of territorial princes since 1521 and the Diet of Worms.⁴⁰⁸ Here, we see Melanchthon doing all that he can to ensure continued support for his party through his subtextual, indirect flattery; in complimenting Frederick the Wise, Melanchthon seeks to flatter John Frederick into similar support.

The depiction of Frederick the Wise, and by implication John Frederick, significantly draws on a well-established biblical understanding of the ruler as guardian of the Church as well as pre-sixteenth century and pre-Reformation concepts of the ruler as protector and father of the people with responsibility for piety and morals, as Erasmus makes clear in the *Institutio principis christiani*.⁴⁰⁹ In accepting the ruler's responsibility in creating stability and, in turn, piety, it is all the more significant that this allows Melanchthon to emphasise a mutually beneficial relationship, thereby indicating the obvious humanist agenda at work in the *Historia*; namely, that it was the secular ruler's solemn duty to patronise religion and learning, as Frederick the Wise is shown to do, to effect proper social order. Melanchthon had made the case for religion and learning as bulwarks of peace and order clear in a letter to John Frederick;⁴¹⁰ this view, only faintly suggested here, is articulated more fully in Melanchthon's writings following the Peasants' Revolt. In *Widder die artickel der Bawrschafft*, written at the request of the Elector of Palatine in 1525, Melanchthon emphasises the responsibility of the prince in securing stability through moral and religious training, and identifies learning as the foundation of peace.⁴¹¹

Saxony in 1542, and while he was an ardent supporter of the cause, his stubbornness did not always work to the advantage of the Protestant movement, causing problems in Regensburg and Halle in 1541 and 1542. For a discussion of John Frederick's role in the Reformation, see A. Beck, *Johann Friedrich der Mittlere: Herzog zu Sachsen, Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des 16. Jahrhunderts*, 2 vols, (Weimar: Böhlau, 1858).

⁴⁰⁸ See James M. Estes, *Peace, Order, and the Glory of God: Secular Authority and the Church in the Thought of Luther and Melanchthon 1518-1559* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), p. 31.

⁴⁰⁹ Erasmus, *Institutio principis christiani* (1516), in *Collected Works of Erasmus*, 86 vols (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto P., 1974), XXVII (1986), 245-288.

⁴¹⁰ See letter to John Frederick (April/May 1525), in *Melanchthons Briefwechsel*, 13 volumes, ed. by Heinz Scheible (Stuttgart: Frommann, 1977-), 894, II, 298-302.

⁴¹¹ Blaming the unrest and turbulence of the Peasants' Revolt on radical preaching, Melanchthon repeatedly stresses the responsibility of the ruler in controlling the reform movement from above. In the appendix to the work, composed following the defeat of the peasants, Melanchthon stresses the prince's duty not only to punish the wicked but also to enable the innocent to lead peaceable lives; furthermore, if the prince ensures that God's word is properly preached, God will reward them with peace and good fortune in their rule. See Melanchthon, *Widder die Artickel der Bawrschafft* (1525), CR, XX, 641-662 and in Robert Stupperich, ed., *Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl: Studienausgabe* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1951), I, p. 211 ff. See also Robert Kolb, 'The Theologians and the

This work developed themes that he had initiated in the *Epitome renovate ecclesiasticae doctrinae* of 1524, written for the Landgrave of Hesse, in which Melanchthon articulates his view that laws and institutions are a *paedagogia* or a means of instructing and disciplining public morals.⁴¹²

Therefore, the encomiastic depiction of Frederick the Wise in the *Historia* conforms with expectations from classical, medieval and humanist writing, thereby revealing something of its narrative ancestry; importantly, its presence in the *Historia* enables Melanchthon to transfer his argument from a mere life of Luther to support his claim for the primacy of humanist learning in creating good society and good religion, a thesis familiar to humanist life-writing.

Melanchthon's understanding of the nature of power was well-established prior to the publication of the *Historia*; Melanchthon distinguishes here between power of the two realms, a view clearly identified by Luther, Melanchthon, and the Lutheran party in Scripture,⁴¹³ but shows how they relate to each other. Following the failure of national reform at the Diet of Worms in 1521, the success of the movement was placed in territorial princes' hands. If the wicked are not restrained, Luther's understanding suggested chaos would ensue.⁴¹⁴ Melanchthon had earlier blamed the Peasants' Revolt on radical preaching, thereby establishing the need for social discipline.⁴¹⁵ To this, Melanchthon had added that religion and learning were the bulwarks of peace and order; thus, it was the secular ruler's duty to patronise religion and learning to effect proper social order, thereby casting learning as necessary to religion, and, in turn, order itself.⁴¹⁶ The depiction of Frederick the Wise draws on the tradition of the Renaissance Prince and the ruler as guardian of the Church and asserts Melanchthon's belief that government support of true religion would result in

Peasants: Conservative Evangelical Reactions to the German Peasants Revolt', *ARG*, 69 (1978), 103-131 (pp. 115-122).

⁴¹² Melanchthon, *Epitome renovate ecclesiasticae doctrinae* (Wittenberg: Nikolaus Schirlentz, 1524), reproduced in *MSA*, I, pp. 179-189. Wengert discusses the importance of the *Epitome* and *Widder die Artikel der Bawrschafft* in Timothy J. Wengert, *Human Freedom, Christian Righteousness: Philipp Melanchthon's Exegetical Dispute with Erasmus of Rotterdam*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (Oxford: Oxford Univ. P., 1998), pp. 110-113.

⁴¹³ Luther establishes that civil obedience is also anchored in Romans 13. 1-17; 1 Peter 2. 13-14, and Titus 3. 1; see *WA*, 6, 258-60.

⁴¹⁴ *WA Br.*, 2, 357.44-47.

⁴¹⁵ See Melanchthon, *Widder die Artikel der Bawrschafft* (1525), *MSA* 7/2 164.10-12.

⁴¹⁶ For further discussion of this question, see James M. Estes, *Peace, Order, and the Glory of God: Secular Authority and the Church in the Thought of Luther and Melanchthon 1518-1559* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), p. 81.

peace and order and that it was the public duty and responsibility of princes to ensure this.⁴¹⁷

This draws on the well-established concept in Renaissance Europe that pious citizens made for good, loyal subjects, and provides political impetus to Melanchthon's call for appropriate, good preaching. Frederick the Wise and his successors bore the roles of the traditional pre-Reformation protectors, evinced in pre-sixteenth century catechetical literature which cast the ruler as the father of the people with responsibility for their morals and piety; this obvious humanist view is also found in Erasmus's *Christian Prince*.⁴¹⁸ In this way, this depiction of Frederick the Wise prepares the reader for another major theme of this period of the *Historia*, namely peace and stability.

4. Peace and Stability

Having emphasised the virtues of the political leader in the context of creating good, social order, Melanchthon repeatedly emphasises the importance of and need for peace throughout the passages dealing with Luther's life after 1517 in the second half of the *Historia*.

This plea anchors the *Historia* in the well-established genre of advisory literature with its clear classical roots. This plea must, of course, be seen against the unstable background of the period; at the time of the *Historia*'s production in 1546, the political scene remained unpredictable after the preceding turbulent decades which had witnessed the Peasants' Revolt and subsequent war as well as the Schmalkaldic League wars of the 1540s. The Council of Trent, held in the year of the *Historia*'s publication, had issued decrees against Lutheran innovation, and the Emperor was pressing for war against reformed Hesse and Saxony. Following Luther's death in 1546, the University of Wittenberg had twice dispersed in June and July owing to war; the effect of this instability created an atmosphere in which moderate reformers such as Melanchthon longed for peace irrespective of and in addition to his natural inclinations and desires consistent with Renaissance humanism. While Melanchthon failed to attain the peace he desired, the *Historia* repeats his conviction that social stability was achievable; indeed, the conviction

⁴¹⁷ See Timothy J. Wengert, 'Philip Melanchthon and a Christian Politics', *Lutheran Quarterly*, 17 (Milwaukee, WIS.: Lutheran Quarterly, 2003), 29-62.

⁴¹⁸ See also Estes, 'Officium principis christiani: Erasmus and the Origins of the Protestant State Church', *ARG*, 83 (1992), 49-72.

posited in the first half of the *Historia* that humanistic study was integral to evangelical reform is clearly reiterated here alongside the view that such study fosters moderation, the ‘paramount view of learned churchmen’.⁴¹⁹

Classical literature had long argued the case for peace and stability in society; this is epitomised in Plato’s *Republic*, the themes of which are developed consistently over time and reach increasing popularity in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.⁴²⁰ Erasmus had articulated the significance of concord in the *Querela pacis*,⁴²¹ in which he argued for the need for peace in the world and appealed to man’s better nature, drawing his arguments from the Classical as well as biblical tradition. Throughout the text, Erasmus repeatedly calls for adherence to the Christian teaching of brotherly love:

Lungat aeterna concordia, quos tam multis rebus coniunxit natura, pluribus
Christus. Communibus studiis agant omnes, quod ad omnium ex aequo
felicitatem pertinet. (XXVIII^v).⁴²²

While Erasmus stresses positively the effort required to bring about the happiness of all, Luther made clear his position toward political unrest in *Wider die Mordischen und Reubischen Rotten der Bawren*:

Dreierlei greuliche Sünden gegen Gott und Menschen laden diese Bauern auf sich, womit sie den Tod an Leib und Seele mannigfaltig verdient haben: Zum ersten, daß sie ihrer Obrigkeit Treue und Gehorsam geschworen haben, ihr untertänig und gehorsam zu sein, wie Gott solches gebietet, da er Luk. 20, 25 sagt: „Gebet dem Kaiser, was des Kaisers ist“, und Röm. 13, I: „Jedermann sei untertan der Obrigkeit“ usw. [...] Zum zweiten, daß sie Aufruhr anrichten, frevelhaft Klöster und Schlösser berauben und plündern, die nicht ihnen gehören, womit sie, wie die öffentlichen Straßenräuber und Mörder, allein wohl zwiefältig des Todes an Leib und Seele schuldig sind. Auch ist

⁴¹⁹ Weiss, ‘Erasmus at Luther’s Funeral: Melanchthon’s Biographies of Luther’, *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 16 (1985), 91-114 (103).

⁴²⁰ For a general representation of these themes, see Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ed. by R. M. Adams (New York; London: Norton, 1992) and Thomas More, *Utopia*, ed. and trans. by George M. Logan, Robert M. Adams, and Clarence Miller (New York; London: Norton, 1995).

⁴²¹ See Erasmus, *Querela Pacis* (Basel: Froben, 1517), in *CWE*, xxvii, 289-322.

⁴²² Erasmus, *Querela Pacis*, in *CWE*, 27, LB IV, 642 A (p. 321).

ein aufrührerischer Mensch, von dem man das bezeugen kann, schon in Gottes und kaiserlicher Acht, so daß recht und gut tut, wer den am ersten töten kann und mag. Denn über einen öffentlichen Aufrührer ist ein jeglicher Mensch beides, Obrichter und Scharfrichter, gleich als wenn ein Feuer ausbricht: wer am ersten löschen kann, der ist der Beste. Denn Aufruhr ist nicht ein einfacher Mord; sondern wie ein großes Feuer, das ein Land anzündet und verwüstet, so bringt Aufruhr mit sich ein Land voll Mords, Blutvergießen und macht Witwen und Waisen und zerstört alles, wie das allergrößte Unglück. Drum soll hier erschlagen, würgen und stechen, heimlich oder öffentlich, wer da kann, und daran denken, daß nichts Giftrigeres, Schädlicheres, Teuflischeres Hund totschiagen muß: schlägst du [ihn] nicht, so schlägt er dich und ein ganzes Land mit dir. Zum dritten, daß sie solche [...] greuliche Sünde mit dem Evangelium bemänteln, daß sie sich christliche Brüder nennen, Eid und Huldigung abnehmen und die Menschen zwingen, es bei solchen Greueln mit ihnen zu halten. Damit werden sie die allergrößten Gotteslästerer und Schänder seines heiligen Namens, und ehren und dienen so unter dem Vorgeben des Evangeliums dem Teufel, womit sie wohl zehnmal den Tod an Leib und Seele verdienen, so daß ich von häßlicherer Sünde nie gehört habe [...]. [...] Denn ein Fürst und Herr muß hier bedenken, daß er Gottes Amtmann und Diener seines Zorn ist, Röm. 13, 4, dem das Schwert über solche Buben befohlen ist, und [daß er] sich vor Gott ebenso sehr versündigt, wenn er nicht straft und [dem Unrecht] wehrt und sein Amt nicht ausübt, als wenn einer mordet, dem das Schwert nicht befohlen ist. Denn wo er es kann und nicht straft, es sei durch Mord oder Blutvergießen, so ist er an allem Mord und Übel schuldig, das solche Buben begehen, weil er durch Vernachlässigung seines göttlichen Befehls mutwillig solche Buben ihre Bosheit üben läßt, obwohl er dem wehren kann und dessen schuldig ist. Deshalb ist hier nicht zu schlafen. Es gilt hier auch nicht Geduld oder Barmherzigkeit. Es ist hier des Schwerts und Zorns Zeit und nicht der Gnaden Zeit. So soll nun die Obrigkeit hier getrost fortfahren und mit gutem Gewissen dreinschlagen, so lange sie einen Arm regen kann.⁴²³

⁴²³ Luther, WA, 18, 357-361 (344).

For Luther, the peasants had rebelled against their oaths of loyalty to their rulers, and as all are subject to higher power, nothing can be more hurtful than a rebel, and Luther accordingly urged the princes to take action against the peasants. The pamphlet was produced at the height of the Peasants' War and expanded on Luther's earlier *Ermahnung zum Frieden auf die zwölf Artickel der Bauernschaft in Schwaben* (1525).⁴²⁴ In its severity, the text offers no compromise and is one of Luther's most powerful statements; while he does not fully endorse the actions of the princes, he does invoke them to combat with all their worldly power the peasants' actions which he sees as threatening world order and abusing Scripture.

While the combination of piety and learning in creating peace had long been taken for granted, a trend had developed in the sixteenth century to regard humanist training as the backbone of the new church order.⁴²⁵ As such, the depiction of Frederick the Wise reflects the tradition of piety and learning as the necessary foundations of order; however, while Luther is desirous of tranquility, 'sed tranquillitatis cupidum fuisse', the severity of his character provides an obstacle to attaining peace that must be corrected by Frederick the Wise and encouraged by Erasmus:

Scio etiam saepe eum sciscitatum de rebus ipsis eruditorum et sapientum sententias, et in eo Conventu, quem in urbe Agrippina Colonia egit Imperator Carolus V post coronationem, Erasmum Roterodamum, amanter orasse, ut libere diceret, num errare Lutherum in iis controversiis iudicaret, de quibus praecipue disseruisset. Ibi Erasmus plane dixit, recte sentire Lutherum, sed lenitatem se in eo desiderare. Qua de re gravissime postea Dux Fridericus ad Lutherum scribens, valde eum hortatus est, ut styli asperitatem moderaretur. (Biii^r)

This plea for moderation, 'sed lenitatem se in eo desiderare' and 'ut styli asperitatem moderaretur', is made all the more urgent when seen against the backdrop of

⁴²⁴ For the full text of the *Ermahnung zum Frieden auf die zwölf Artickel der Bauernschaft in Schwaben*, see WA, 18, 291-325.

⁴²⁵ See a discussion of the work of Johann Sturm in Anton Schindling, *Humanistische Hochschule und freie Reichstadt: Gymnasium und Akademie in Strassburg 1538-1621*, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte, 77 (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1977).

Luther's earlier representation in which his personality is acknowledged to lack precisely this characteristic.⁴²⁶

In the first half of the *Historia*, Melanchthon had endowed Luther with certain imitable characteristics, presenting his faults by discreet means; as he repeats here, Luther lacked a certain kind of learning which was responsible for the absence of a particular kind of temperament; thus, Melanchthon's representation is locked into a contradiction which casts Luther's major theological development as a result of his humanism while indicating that where Luther went astray was a result of insufficient humanist training. As curious as this may initially seem, there is a logic to Melanchthon's reasoning: the effect of this is to question what Luther might have achieved had he enjoyed a full humanist education, thereby endorsing the major theme of the second half of the *Historia*, if not the work in its entirety, namely the essential need for humanist education in providing the learning necessary to create piety and stability. Simultaneously, this argument sees the first half of the biography compensating for Luther's shortcomings identified in the funeral oration,⁴²⁷ while the second half of the *Historia* mounts a defence of Luther against his enemies' charges which Melanchthon considered damaging to the evangelical cause, namely innovation and that Luther fermented political unrest. Indeed, the *Historia* states this position directly:

Symbola vero Apostolicum, Nicenum, et Athanasianum purissime retinuit, Deinde in ritibus et traditionibus humanis quid et cur mutandum su satis copiose in multis scriptis exponit, Et quid retineri voluerit, et quam formam doctrinae et administrationis Sacramentorum probaverit, liquet ex Confessione, quam Dux Saxoniae Elector Iohannes, et princeps Philippus Landgravius Cattorum etc. in Conventu Augustano Imp. Carolo V. Anno 1530 exhibuerunt. Liqueat idem ex ipsis Ecclesiae ritibus in hac urbe, et ex Doctrina, quae sonat in Ecclesia nostra, cuius summa in Confessione perspicue comprehensa est. Quod ideo recito, ut non solum considerent pii, quos errores taxaverit, quae Idola sustulerit Lutherus, sed etiam sciant complexum esse universam doctrinam

⁴²⁶ See the *Historia*, Biii^r.

⁴²⁷ Melanchthon, *Oratio funere in reverendi viri D. Martini Lutheri* (Wittenberg: Georg Rhau, 1546) in *CR*, 6, 155-70. For a discussion of this point, see James M. Weiss, 'Erasmus at Luther's Funeral: Melanchthon's Funeral Oration for and Biography of Luther', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, XVI, 1 (1985), 92.

Ecclesiae necessariam, et puritatem in ritibus restituisset, et piis Exempla instaurandarum Ecclesiarum monstrasse. Ac utile est, posteritatem scire, quid probaverit Lutherus. (Biiii^{v-t})

While Melanchthon does indicate that Luther possesses a certain kind of temper, this is seen as a consequence of his lack of a certain humanist learning, and Melanchthon passes over this to show that what Luther did achieve, he achieved as a consequence of the humanist training he had received. This representation indicates that where Luther went astray, his lack of humanism was at fault and naturally poses the question as to what Luther might have achieved had his education been more developed.

The second half of the text prepares the reader for the defence against innovation and fermented political unrest, by showing that Luther remained in the bounds of his office unlike many bishops. By not mentioning the question of religious change, responsibility is clearly placed on Carlstadt.

Ritus non mutavit ipse, sed eo absente Carolostadius et alii ritus mutarunt: cumque quaedam tumultuosius fecisset Carolostadius, rediens Lutherus, quid probaret aut non probaret, aeditis suae sententiae perspicuis testimoniis, declaravit. (Biiii^v)

Once again, Luther appears mid-passage to dominate the text, assuming priority over the sentence's other nominative subject, Carlstadt. The grammar of the passage suggests Luther must take over from a situation created by the radical reformer with the description framed by Luther as subject both not changing rites, '[r]itus non mutavit ipse', and indicating his disapproval of Carlstadt's changes, 'non probaret, aeditis suae sententiae perspicuis testimoniis, declaravit'. The changes to which Melanchthon refers are, of course, primarily in relation to the Eucharist where Carlstadt removed any question of sacrifice as well as the physical presence of Christ, and celebrated in the German vernacular.⁴²⁸ Thus, significant change is forced by Carlstadt: once again, Luther is forced to indicate his approval to matters; the logic of the text suggests that he might otherwise have remained silent about

⁴²⁸ For a discussion of Carlstadt's reforms, see Alejandro Zorzin, 'Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt', in *The Reformation Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Early Modern Period*, ed. by Carter Lindberg (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 327-338 (p. 329).

certain questions.⁴²⁹ Importantly, Melanchthon's depiction casts Luther not as an agent of change but as someone who is brought to react and respond, and forced into action by necessity; this passage recalls the description of how Luther was brought into the Indulgences' debate, almost against his own will. In doing this, Melanchthon identifies the origin of the problem with those who promulgated the error rather than Luther; Melanchthon's Luther is thus a man who maintains order and stability. This view is consistent with Melanchthon's more general regard for the clergy's office; as seen in his various lives of the saints, Melanchthon's saints do not meddle in the affairs of civil government but observe their *metea vocationis* and focus on the religious life; thus the *Historia* developed the *via* of early-Lutheran hagiography, where the absence of medieval or German saints in such *vitae* avoids churchmen who held or sought political influence.⁴³⁰

Therefore, the repeated calls for peace which are present in the second half of the *Historia* reflect the established practice of classical and contemporary advisory literature, but they do so with a humanistic twist: first, they support the interpretative thesis of Luther adopted by Melanchthon that Luther sought peace; secondly, and more significantly, the plea for peace emphasises the importance of humanistic training in creating proper religion which, Melanchthon shows, in turn fosters peace. In this way, the representation of peace and stability reveals an important aspect of the *Historia* and Melanchthon's own thinking; that humanism has not only returned the pious to true religion but is necessary in maintaining it. Subsequent generations took for granted this synthesis of humanism and reformation which Melanchthon proposed; however, the distinction between the two would have been foreign to Lutheran and Protestant culture of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries for whom a humanist education was self-evident requirement of Protestant culture.⁴³¹ As divisions grew among the Lutheran parties, humanism in its later manifestations was to furnish a unifying cultural idiom;⁴³² this explains the numerous reprintings and re-editions of the *Historia*, which functions as a classic in its synthesis of reformed,

⁴²⁹ See also the *Invocavit* sermons of 1522, in WA, 10 3, 1-64.

⁴³⁰ See Georg Major, *Vitae Patrum* (Wittenberg: Seitzium, 1544), A6^v.

⁴³¹ See Manfred Fleischer, 'The Institutionalisation of Humanism in Protestant Silesia', *ARG* 66 (1975), 256-274, or Erick Trunz, 'Der deutsche Späthumanismus als Standeskultur', *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Erziehung und des Unterrichts* 21 (1931), 17-54, reprinted in *Deutsche Barockforschung*, ed. by R. Alewyn (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1965), pp. 147-181.

⁴³² See Werner Kaegi, 'Nationale und universale Denkformen im deutschen Humanismus des 16. Jahrhunderts', *Die Erziehung* 10 (1935), 145-159; and R. J. W. Evans, *Rudolf II and His World: A Study in Intellectual History 1576-1612* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973).

religious belief and humanist thought. As inaccurate or forced as Melanchthon's view of the relationship between humanism, Luther, and reform are, it fits the harmonious interpretation of the age and subsequent generations, and was to become a primary goal for the first generation of Lutheran clergy.⁴³³

5. Change

The Reformation poses a difficult question for its early historians, especially those who supported the reform churches; as a schismatic movement from an institution that argued historical legitimacy through apostolic succession, the reform churches had to answer the charge of innovation and heresy. This challenge was met by emplotting the history of reform as orthodox alongside a view of the Roman Church in continual decline over centuries as the true heresy. In the *Historia*, Melanchthon personifies this interpretation of history and reform theology in Luther and grants him a secure place in the history and continuity of orthodox theology. Nevertheless, as has been seen, Melanchthon's Luther is not a man without criticism.

Although the *Historia* offers direct and indirect criticism of Luther, this is clearly done to support the humanist agenda that Melanchthon indirectly asserts. At the same time, this criticism does not seek to condemn Luther nor his part in the schism brought to the Church; indeed, developing a standard early Protestant argument, Melanchthon argues that Luther and the schism do not represent a break from Rome, but rather Rome's corruption has led the Church away from evangelical truth, as represented in Melanchthon's narrative in the person of Luther. In this way, Melanchthon asserts a doctrine that is central to the early reform movement and which locates the *Historia* as key in defining both Luther and the Reformation movement itself. This interpretation demonstrates a fundamental development in the formation of a Protestant historical consciousness which has endured and remains present in current Protestant thinking.⁴³⁴ In turn, this shows the significance of

⁴³³ Weiss indicates that 'Melanchthon's failure to persuade the Catholic and Imperial parties hardly needs mention. But in Lutheran circles he continued to reiterate the conviction of the first half of the biography that humanistic study was integral to evangelical reform and that such study fosters moderation, the paramount virtue of learned churchmen.' See James M. Weiss, 'Erasmus at Luther's Funeral: Melanchthon's Biographies of Luther', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 16 (1985), 91-114 (103).

⁴³⁴ While one might wish to identify such thinking in the more evangelical tradition, its development may be traced throughout Protestant church history; an interesting study of the origins of this understanding are given in, for example, Alexandra Kess, 'Johann Sleidan and the German

history in establishing Protestant identity which mutually benefits history as a discipline and raises its status as a store of precedent and rhetorical defence to charges of innovation.

Melanchthon had always placed a special emphasis on history; his opening lecture at Wittenberg underlined the importance of history, portrayed as the teacher of life,⁴³⁵ and in 1530, he attempted to introduce history as a distinct subject worthy of academic study at Wittenberg but failed.⁴³⁶ Melanchthon had authored, edited, initiated numerous historical works, and distinguished between a history as a portrayal of a single event or stream of similar events and the chronicle as a comprehensive account.⁴³⁷ Ultimately, history, for Melanchthon, testified to the existence of God and acted as a means of communication between Him and man.

In the *Historia*, Melanchthon offers standard tropes which indicate an understanding of decline and fall in Church history; the first of these casts Luther as the restorer of purity:

Quod ideo recito, ut non solum considerent pii, quos errores taxaverit, quae Idola sustulerit Lutherus, sed etiam sciant complexum esse universam doctrinam Ecclesiae necessariam, et puritatem in ritibus restituisse, et piis Exempla instaurandarum Ecclesiarum monstrasse. Ac utile est, posteritatem scire, quid probaverit Lutherus. (Biiii^f)

Melanchthon expresses here the well-established interpretation of the Roman Church as having been sullied and distanced from its evangelical purity, ‘quos errores taxaverit, quae Idola sustulerit Lutherus’, a theme equally developed in the *Chronicon* as to how the Church is gradually corrupted by the moral stagnation of the papacy.⁴³⁸ It is in response to such errors that Luther replies, ‘taxaverit’ and ‘restituisse’, and it is significant again that Luther responds out of necessity. This depiction removes direct responsibility from Luther via this narrative wildcard to

Historians’, in *Johann Sleidan and the Protestant Vision of History* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 119-149.

⁴³⁵ CF. Knappe, ‘Melanchthon und die Historien’, in *ARG*, 91, 111-126 (pp. 114f.).

⁴³⁶ See E. C. Scherer, *Geschichte und Kirchengeschichte an den deutschen Universitäten* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1927).

⁴³⁷ See Emil Menke-Gluckert, *Die Geschichtsschreibung der Reformation und Gegenreformation: Bodin u. die Begründung der Geschichtsmethodologie durch Bartholomaeus Keckermann* (Osterwieck: Zickfeldt, 1912), pp. 45f.

⁴³⁸ Johannes Carion, *Cronicon Carionis* (Wittenberg: Georg Rhau, 1558-60), fols 5^v-6^r & 9^{r-v}.

identify blame in those who promulgate error and abuse. Simultaneously, the *Chronicon* shows true faith had always been represented by one group at least but who had often suffered persecution; this interpretation functions in effect as the Protestant equivalent to apostolic succession with doctrinal truth and purity persevered in the persecuted minority. Once clear, the Church has now become impure and requires divine intervention to restore Her to purity. On the one hand, Luther is placed here among the persecuted minority maintaining doctrinal purity, but the representation is clear in casting Luther effectively as the equal to those who originate the error and whom he is seen to defeat; for Melanchthon, there is no sense of persecuted minority but rather defiant righteousness in his depiction of Luther.

This concept of true faith preserved by true witnesses is made all the more explicit within the history of corruption, represented by the Roman Church:

Secutae sunt igitur Disputationes, De discrimine legum divinarum et humarnarum, de tetra prophanatione Coenae Domini, in venditione et applicatione eius pro aliis. Hic explicanda tota Sacrificii ratio fuit, et ostendendus usus Sacramentorum. Cumque iam audirent homines pii in Monasteriis, fugienda esse Idola, discedere ex impia servitute coeperunt. (Biii^v)

This understanding was already well-established; Sebastian Franck had argued that the line of heresies from the Church's foundation was in fact a continuous chain of God's true witnesses.⁴³⁹ Franck emphasised the authenticity of his sources, gave a list of classical authors as models, and indicated his love of the truth and impartiality. In due course, this understanding of history was to find a more developed expression in the works of Flacius Illyricus.⁴⁴⁰ If we accept as true Melanchthon's description of the 'homines pii', the logic of the text is clear: their faith and piety can reasonably only lead them out of the monastery and away from the corrupt theology of the Roman Church. By extension, those who remain in cloistered life, accept such theology and cannot be pious.

⁴³⁹ Sebastian Franck, *Chronica, Zeitbuch, und Geschichtsbibel* (Strassburg: Balthassar Beck, 1531); for a discussion of his topic, see Alexandra Kess, 'Sleidan and the German Historians', in *Johann Sleidan and the Protestant Vision of History*, St Andrews Studies in Reformation History (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 119-149 (126-127).

⁴⁴⁰ Flacius Illyricus *Catalogus testium veritatis* (Leiden; Lyon: Candinus, 1556).

These tropes of restoration and true witnesses are repeated throughout the second half of the *Historia* and demonstrate how history had become a polemical tool; this interpretation of Church history is clearly borrowed from earlier heterodox groups such as the Waldensians and Hus's followers.⁴⁴¹ This redefined narrative interpretation clearly supports the Reform movement and shows how, in the Reformation, history was *per se* a polemical tool in which the possession of the past was a central debate, precisely because the opponents of the Protestants claimed the latter had no past; to counter the argument of innovation, Protestants had to locate themselves in history. By identifying heterodox groups along with orthodox figures in ecclesiastical history, rectifiers of history such as Melanchthon establish continuity of doctrinal purity and locate the early Protestant movement as the one, true church. It is primarily this approach through narrative and the selective identification of figures from the past which reveals the development of a clear historical consciousness, made necessary by the Reformation. The Reformation created a need for Protestants to reinterpret the Catholic past and explain, or justify, the development of history. For Melanchthon, Luther's own restoration of truth reaches its culmination in his translation of the Gospel, here surrounded with the typical metaphors of light and darkness, kindling and purity:

Et quanquam ipsius viri virtus etiam laude digna est, qui Dei donis reverenter usus est, tamen praecipue Deo gratias agi necesse est, quod per eum restituit nobis Evangelii lucem, et ipsius doctrinae memoria retinenda et propaganda est. Nec moveor clamoribus Epicureorum aut Hypocritarum, qui aut rident aut damnant manifestam veritatem, sed vere statuo consensum perpetuum esse Catholicae Ecclesiae Dei hanc ipsam doctrinae vocem, quae sonat in Ecclesiis nostris, et huius doctrinae agnitione necessario regendam esse invocationem et vitam. Bvi^v

⁴⁴¹ On the Waldensians, see Peter Biller, 'Medieval Waldensians' Construction of the Past', in *The Waldenses, 1170-1530*, Variorum Collected Studies Series (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 191-204. For a survey of one aspect of Hussite historical thinking, see Murray L. Wagner, *Petr Chelcický: A Radical Separatist in Hussite Bohemia*, Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History, 25 (Scotdale, PA: Herald P., 1983).

The use of such metaphors lexically ties the recovery of Gospel truths both internally to Luther's earlier theological works and outside the *Historia* to the Humanists' discovery of classical learning; the subtext of the passage is clear in suggesting that Biblical truth is achieved and made possible through knowledge that is only accessible through Humanism. This argument is developed here in Luther's restoration of the Gospel through his translation, while Melanchthon casts his opponents as Epicureans, Hypocrites, the impious, and the unlearned. Again, such descriptors are the stock abuse of humanists towards scholastics, while true believers are pious and learned. Thus, only those who have benefitted from a thorough education in the Word, in all its Reformed understanding, may be considered to be pious and to believe.

This depiction legitimizes Luther's act which had been the target of condemnation but which Melanchthon identifies as arguably Luther's greatest contribution, again endowing the humanist agenda throughout the *Historia* with significance. This anchoring of the Protestant faith in tradition is essential in legitimizing the cause and countering the charges of innovation and heresy, but it is made all the more significant for locating it simultaneously in the humanist act of vernacular translation.

Haec non modo eo commemoro, ut Lutherum et eius auditores defendam, sed etiam ut piaie mentes hoc tempore et ad posteritatem cogitent, qualis sit et semper fuerit verae Ecclesiae Dei gubernatio, quomodo Deus sibi voce Evangelii aeternam Ecclesiam ex hac massa peccati, hoc est, ex magna hominum colluie excerptat, inter quos lucet Evangelium, ut scintilla in tenebris. Ut Pharisaeorum tempore tamen Zacharias, Elisabeth, Maria, et alii multi verae doctrinae custodes fuerunt, Ita etiam ante haec tempora multi fuerunt, recte invocantes Deum, alii magis alii minus perspicue tenentes Evangelii doctrinam. Talis fuit et ille Senex, de quo dixi, qui Lutherum conflictantem pavoribus saepe erexit, eique aliquo modo monstrator fuit doctrinae et fide. Bv^{v-r}

It is notable that Luther *et al* are witnesses through things heard, a standard, biblical means of divine message which brings the 'voce Evangelii' to all. This, Melanchthon's mixed metaphor would have us see, brings light to darkness,

‘lucet...in tenebris’. The idiom of Luther’s acts places him as a conservative with Gospel pedigree ; the impact of Melanchthon’s depiction could not be more orthodox and semiotically seeks to authorise and sanction Luther’s heretical acts.

By casting Luther as the latest in a long line of divine agents, Melanchthon avoids the allegation of change and innovation, and asserts the orthodox character of the new Church’s theology. The identification of Luther as the latest figure in a long line of witnesses reaches its most overt articulation in positioning him as a latter-day father of the Church:

Gratias igitur agamus Deo aeterno Patri Domini nostri Ihesu Christi, qui Martini Lutheri ministerio ex fontibus Evangelicis rursus eiici coenum et venena voluit, et Ecclesiae puram doctrinam restituit, qua de re cogitantes omnes pios toto orbe terrarum coniungere vota et gemitus decet, ac petere ardentibus pectoribus, ut Deus confirmet hoc quod operatus est in nobis, propter templum sanctum suum. (Bviii^f)

Unsurprisingly, we find the common trope of driving out the dirt and poison from the Church, and witness Luther restoring purity, ‘ex fontibus Evangelicis rursus eiici coenum et venena voluit, et Ecclesiae puram doctrinam restituit’. Melanchthon offers a prayer for the Church: he petitions God to unite all in the Gospel, guide in spirit, guide in studies, and preserve governments: in effect, this prayer summarises Melanchthon’s depiction of Luther post-1517 and is the prayer of Luther as a brilliant witness to the faith.

Melanchthon not only uses this section of the *Historia* as an opportunity to situate Luther in divine history but also to repeat the stock criticisms of the Roman Church. In his history of the ages of the Church, Melanchthon shows how the Church has moved from a state of purity to error, and has been cleansed and restored by an individual calling for reform. Thus, Luther becomes the latest figure after Methodius, Augustine, the Franciscans and Dominicans. Significantly, such earlier ‘reformers’ achieved the purification and restoration of the Church through calls identical to those of the Lutheran reformers: a call for faith alone, a return to scripture, and purity of faith and discipline respectively. The cycle of purity, decline and fall, reform would suggest, however, that the Lutheran Church itself is

susceptible to such error.⁴⁴² Significantly, in Melanchthon's *Historia*, Luther is here seen to succeed where his illustrious predecessors have failed: Luther is thus depicted as developing the work of his theological antecedents, each thoroughly orthodox, but attains the goal that eluded them. Thus, Melanchthon repeated the view, earlier expressed in his funeral oration for Luther, that he envisions Luther as having been divinely sent to kindle anew the light of the Gospel.⁴⁴³ In Melanchthon's telling, Luther's doctrine was so far above human understanding that he could only have been instructed by God; thus, the real moving force is God and not Luther; in effect, this depiction exculpates Luther and in considering the ensuing turmoil, Melanchthon blames those too benighted to accept but accepts Luther's responsibility in this regard.

In conclusion, the second half of the *Historia* reasserts the identification of Luther made elsewhere in the text as the latest prophet calling the Church back to purity. Significantly, Luther is seen to succeed where others have failed, and thereby we see how Melanchthon credits Luther with an exalted status as an inimitable figure chosen by God to reveal His will. This success is cast logically and lexically as a clear consequence of Luther's humanist education and skills, thereby affirming the educational subtext of the second half of the *Historia*. Melanchthon offers a subsequently standard Protestant view in its infancy in the *Historia* of ecclesiastical history which counters the arguments of his opponents while defending the authenticity of Protestant movement *per se*.

⁴⁴² This understanding calls to mind the historical interpretation found in the *Chronicon Carionis*; the text is divided into three sections to correspond with the 6000-year scheme of prophecy of Elijah in 1 Kings 19, separating the history of the world into three equal portions: barrenness; under the law; and the Messiah. In addition, the *Chronicon* imposed the scheme of four empires from Daniel 2. 21: Babylonia, Persia, Greece, and Rome. In the *Chronicon*, the Roman Empire corresponded to the third period of the prophecy; the last empire found its culmination in the Holy Roman Empire and the German people. The Ottoman Empire and the Papacy were the enemy without and within; with them came the end of the last third age and the fourth empire.

⁴⁴³ See Melanchthon, *Oratio funere in reverendi viri D. Martini Lutheri* (Wittenberg: Georg Rhau, 1546), c. 728, and also *De Luthero et Aetatibus Ecclesiae*, CR, XI, 783-788.

6. Humanism

It is well-known that Luther corresponded with Erasmus around the time of the posting of the Ninety-Five Theses, and that their epistolary relationship was initially positive. It is equally well-known that the two reformers subsequently fell out and their relationship developed a more acrimonious nature.⁴⁴⁴ It is, therefore, somewhat surprising to find Erasmus playing a significant part in Luther's biography; in a typically Melanchthonian fashion, however, Erasmus is present in the *Historia* to add his substantial humanist credentials to aid Melanchthon's defence of an archetypal humanist virtue and its centrality to the success of the Reformation. As one of the leading humanists of the sixteenth century, it is only to be expected that Melanchthon would invest the *Historia* with various themes in support of the humanist cause. One such theme so clearly articulated in the *Historia* is moderation, and specifically the recognition of the lack of it in Luther's character and his greater need for it for the Reformation to succeed.

The virtue of moderation, or the *aurea mediocritas*, is well-rooted in the classical tradition and is praised as a characteristic in the standard works;⁴⁴⁵ as such, it is hardly surprising to find it present in the work of the humanist Melanchthon. However, the manner of its entrance to the text is highly significant as is how Melanchthon ties Luther to Erasmus, and, more importantly, the Reformation agenda to humanist education through his call for moderation; ultimately, Melanchthon would have his reader regard moderation as an achievable aim of any humanist education.

Moderation, or rather Luther's lack of it, appears in the *Historia* immediately following the posting of the Ninety-Five Theses. In the first instance, and somewhat curiously so following the logic of the text's development, Luther himself calls for moderation in indulgence practice, and Melanchthon would have the reader understand:

⁴⁴⁴ The bibliography of the relationship between Luther and Erasmus is sizeable; for a brief introduction, see Harry J. McSorley, 'Erasmus versus Luther – Compounding the Reformation Tragedy', in *Catholic Scholars Dialogue with Luther*, ed. by Jared Wicks (Chicago: Loyola, 1970) and John W. O'Malley, 'Erasmus and Luther: Continuity and Discontinuity as Key to their Conflict', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 2 (Oct. 1974), 47-65.

⁴⁴⁵ Horace is perhaps the most obvious champion of the *aurea mediocritas*; for a discussion of the principle in his works, see Michèle Lowrie, *Horace's Narrative Odes* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), pp. 79-97.

Haec initia fuerunt huius controversiae, in qua Lutherus nihil adhuc suspicans aut somnians de futura mutatione rituum, ne quidem ipsas Indulgentias prorsus abiiciebat, sed tantum moderationem flagitabat. (Bii^{v-r})

Luther is here shown to be ardent and irascible but seeks no private gain; his conflict was conducted through teaching and avoided the use of arms, and Luther defends his cause in Melanchthon's version by teaching, and by implication rhetoric, but has no need to resort to combat; indeed, he avoids it. Violence is brought to bear by others; Luther's distinction between the offices of bishop and magistrate moderates the quest for order. The call for all to observe their place in the world's hierarchy is consistent with Luther's world view and recalls his position from elsewhere.⁴⁴⁶ Thus, in its first airing, moderation is seen to be a characteristic of Luther who, Melanchthon urges, sought only to reform. This non-aggressive act, which may be supported by contemporary records,⁴⁴⁷ is in turn supported by the depiction of Frederick the Wise, who was neither an instigator nor an applauder of Luther's:

Cum unus omnium nostrae aetatis Principum Fridericus et tranquillitatis publicae amantissimus fuerit, et minime *πλεονεχτιχὸς*, maximeque solitus sit referre consilia ad communem salutem orbis terrarum, ut ex multis rebus intellegi potest, nec incitator Luthero, nec adplausor fuit, suumque dolorem saepe significavit, quem assidue circumtulit, metuens discordias maiores. (Biii^v)

Given Melanchthon's overtly positive representation of Frederick the Wise as an exemplary ruler, it is obvious here that Melanchthon wishes to validate moderation as a praiseworthy virtue in discerning and establishing the right course of action. Following the textual logic of the *Historia*, it is therefore surprising to read a direct criticism of Luther, albeit cast into the mouths of both Erasmus and Frederick the

⁴⁴⁶ In his sermon 'Von weltlicher Obrigkeit: wie weit man ihr Gehorsam schuldig sei' of 1523, Luther acknowledges that that God should be obeyed above all, and that temporal government only extends to life, property and affairs on earth, but importantly that the sword may be used to keep society from chaos. See Luther, *WA*, 11, pp. 245-81.

⁴⁴⁷ The question as to whether Luther wished merely to stimulate academic debate or was pursuing a schismatic course as of course been much discussed over time; the answer is lost in the confessional divide. For the current position, see Martin Treu, 'Der Thesenanschlag fand wirklich statt: ein neuer Beleg aus der Universitätsbibliothek Jena', *Luther*, 78.3 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 140-144.

Wise. Nevertheless, Frederick seeks the counsel of the learned and begins correspondence with Erasmus, reinforcing the concept that learning is necessary to foster good religion. Erasmus acknowledges that Luther is correct but that Luther lacks moderation, leading Frederick to request Luther to ‘lighten the harshness of his pen’, ‘ut styli asperitatem moderaretur’; thus, Luther is criticised by both the scholarly and political leaders of the day. It is worth noting that Luther’s temper has previously been shown to be a result of his lack of humanism:

Ibi Erasmus plane dixit, recte sentire Lutherum, sed lenitatem se in eo desiderare. Qua de re gravissime postea Dux Fridericus ad Lutherum scribens, valde eum hortatus est, ut styli asperitatem moderaretur. (Biii^r)

That Erasmus regarded Luther as lacking caution and moderation is hardly novel; the first contact between Luther and Erasmus in 1518 was initially supportive but with the qualification that Erasmus did not approve of Luther’s confrontational tactics. In his correspondence between 1518 and 1521, Erasmus offered guarded approbation for the Lutheran cause, largely reflecting his desire to protect humanist patristic studies.⁴⁴⁸ Indeed, Melancthon’s depiction in the *Historia* here echoes Erasmus’s own letter to Luther in which he suggested more might be achieved by courtesy and moderation than by antagonism.⁴⁴⁹ These calls were repeated over the following years and by 1521, Erasmus had come to regard Luther as a danger to the Church’s unity;⁴⁵⁰ this combination of Luther’s intransigence and Erasmus’s need to defend himself against charges of having hatched the heresy resulted in an open breach between the two by 1524.

Given the already positive association attached to moderation by humanism, it is all the more significant that Melancthon indicates his allegiance not only to a view he shares with Erasmus but also Erasmus’s direct criticisms of Luther. Thus, Melancthon demonstrates his fundamental status as a humanist even when it

⁴⁴⁸ While Erasmus is open in his approbation of Luther, he is equally guarded and cautious, possibly reflecting his desire to protect humanist-patristic studies. He indicates his belief that the theses will please all except those who make a living from indulgences, and questions whether it expedient to touch this ‘open sore’. As such, Erasmus attempts to maintain the status of referee rather than full participant. See Erasmus’s letter to Colet of March 1518, *CWE*, VI (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto P., 1989), p. 32 [Ep. 786].

⁴⁴⁹ Erasmus to Luther, 30 May 1519, *CWE*, VI (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto P., 1989), p. 392 [Ep. 980].

⁴⁵⁰ See letter to Justus Jonas, May 1521, *CWE*, VI (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto P., 1989), p. 201 [Ep. 1202].

requires criticism of Luther; however, this was not the first occasion that Melanchthon had offered such a view. This depiction repeats the interpretation given in the funeral oration, in which Melanchthon does consider Luther's personality and admits that Luther was problematic; such points suggested the assessment of Erasmus.⁴⁵¹ While it is surprising that he mentions Erasmus here, it reflects the goals, which he held in common with Erasmus, goals which while different were equal in importance to those shared with Luther.⁴⁵² This repeated criticism from the funeral oration invokes Erasmus on the question of Luther's temperament, specifically Luther's harshness and the disruption of civil and religious order. Melanchthon acknowledges Luther's status as a prophet but sees the role his temper played; Melanchthon ends the comment with a deliberately ambiguous quotation from Plutarch to cast Luther as unrefined but good in matters of great importance:⁴⁵³

Ibi Erasmus plane dixit, recte sentire Lutherum, sed lenitatem se in eo desiderare. Qua de re gravissime postea Dux Fridericus ad Lutherum scribens, valde eum hortatus est, ut styli asperitatem moderaretur. Constat etiam Lutherum Cardinali Caietano promissurum fuisse silentium, si adversariis etiam silentium indiceretur. Qua ex re perspicue intelligi potest, tunc quidem nondum eum docuisse, alia se deinceps moturum esse certamina, sed tranquillitatis cupidum fuisse, sed paulatim ad alias materias pertractum esse, undique lacessentibus eum indoctis Scriptoribus. (Biii^r-Biiii^v)

Luther is seen here to be desirous of tranquillity, and the logic of the text has this appear as a consequence of Frederick's initial wish and Erasmus's encouragement with their gentle persuasion taking effect on him and leading him to the classically praised virtue. However, Luther is 'little by little dragged' further into conflict with

⁴⁵¹ While Erasmus's public statements on Luther were initially positive, they became increasingly neutral and called for moderation in the Wittenberg reformer's character; following the break with Luther over the matter of free will, Erasmus became more direct in his assessment. For a discussion of the negative assessment of Luther by Erasmus, see Jacques Chomarat, *Grammaire et rhétorique chez Erasme*, Les Classiques de l'humanisme, 2 vols (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1981), II, p. 1134. See also Heinz Holoczek, 'Die Haltung des Erasmus zu Luther nach dem Scheitern seiner Vermittlungspolitik: 1520-1521', *ARG*, 64 (1973), 85-112.

⁴⁵² For further information on the relationship of the two humanists, see Robert Stupperich, 'Erasmus und Melanchthon in ihren Gemeinsamen Bestrebungen', in *L'Humanisme allemand*, ed. by J.-C. Margolin (Paris: Vrin, 1979), pp. 405-426.

⁴⁵³ For further information on the role of Erasmus in Luther's funeral oration, see James M. Weiss, 'Erasmus at Luther's funeral', 96.

the uneducated, ‘indoctis’, challenging him with Scripture; this again repeats the thesis of *necessitas* and the role it played in the posting of the theses.⁴⁵⁴ The characterisation is polarised once more; personified by Luther, the reformers are cast as learned, pious and questioning before they arrive at the truth and good religion, while their opponents are seen as the opposite. The emphasis on piety and learning results in obedience, and *vice versa*. This depiction allows Melanchthon to maintain Luther’s status as the reluctant rebel who is forced to act by the errors and challenges of his opponents reflects his earlier involvement with Tetzel *et al.*

Although it is clear that Melanchthon regards Luther’s temper ambiguously, acknowledging both its damage and uses to the Reformation, the reader is left in no doubt that Luther would have been more effective had he been moderated and more moderate; indeed, Melanchthon explicitly identifies that a greater humanist education would have achieved this.⁴⁵⁵ Earlier in the *Historia*, Luther’s temper is shown to be a result of his lack of humanism, as is made clear in the passages on university education;⁴⁵⁶ had he enjoyed more of a humanist education, he would have been milder. Melanchthon’s own preference for moderation is here present textually in his refusal to condemn all non-reformers, but the true believers are seen to flee their ‘heresy’ and impious servitude when they meet the truth:

Secutae sunt igitur Disputationes, De discrimine legum divinarum et humarnarum, de tetra prophanatione Coenae Domini, in venditione et applicatione eius pro aliis. Hic explicanda tota Sacrificii ratio fuit, et ostendendus usus Sacramentorum. Cumque iam audirent homines pii in Monasteriis, fugienda esse Idola, discedere ex impia servitute coeperunt.
(Biiii^v)

The reference to moderation functions as a trope and reveals the origins of the text. Subtextually, the inclusion of this negative characteristic displays simultaneously an adherence to humanist life-writing practices; while medieval biography had

⁴⁵⁴ See Chapter 5, ‘The Ninety-Five Theses’, pp. 134-167

⁴⁵⁵ This idea is explored further in a letter to Justus Jonas of 10 May 1521, in which Erasmus identifies Luther’s provocation as the cause and that Luther’s imprudent, impious and violent response have exacerbated the problem; see Erasmus, *CWE*, VI (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto P., 1989), p. 201 [Ep. 1202].

⁴⁵⁶ See Chapter 3, ‘Childhood’, pp. 71-104.

concentrated on the inimitable aspects of a subject's character, biography from the fourteenth century onwards had developed to show what was most individual about the subject, even to the inclusion of certain negative traits; this development allowed the biographer to show what had made the subject a specific individual as an 'evocation of individuality'.⁴⁵⁷

Thus, in Melanchthon's portrait of Luther, we see the typifying and iterative aspects through the earlier description of the ideal scholarly life with the individual, and here negative, traits of Luther's personality. Similarly, and again paying homage to his humanist models, such references reveal Melanchthon's narrative debt to Erasmus. This practice had been advocated by contemporary German authors such as Wimpheling, and some had put forward the Lutheran argument that the inclusion of such characteristics highlighted the need for God's grace and a trust in his saving presence; in this way, saints in early Lutheran hagiography are portrayed as weak or flawed, as fellow Christians rather than inimitable exempla. Wimpheling also made clear that a saint's shortcomings were as informative as his qualities.⁴⁵⁸ In a Lutheran work on the saints from the 1530s, Hermann Bonnus [1504-1548] emphasises the sins and failings of the hero to highlight the need for God's grace and a trust in his saving presence; thus, the saints are portrayed as weak fellow Christians.⁴⁵⁹ Similarly, in his life of St Jerome, Erasmus addresses two principle issues with hagiography: the standards of historical accuracy and the ideals of sanctity; he laments the desire to fill the works with fantasies while complaining of exaggerated tales of ascetism. He calls for a more truthful depiction, including failings that would remind that saints were human and encourage readers to persevere.⁴⁶⁰ These were common enough humanist criticisms that marked an explicit transition affecting biographical standards and show the humanist origins of Melanchthon's text. The inclusion of a negative aspect, while itself suggests an inheritance from other narrative models, challenges the claims that Melanchthon's life of Luther is no real

⁴⁵⁷ James M. Weiss, 'The Technique of Faint Praise: Johann Sturm's *Life of Beatus Rhenanus*', *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance: Travaux et Documents*, 43 (Geneva: Droz, 1981), 289-302 (291).

⁴⁵⁸ See Paul Joachimsen, *Geschichtsauffassung und Geschichtsschreibung in Deutschland unter dem Einfluß des Humanismus* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1910).

⁴⁵⁹ See, for example, the chapter on St Andrew the Apostle in Hermann Bonnus, *Farrago Praecipuorum Exemplorum* (Schwäbisch Hall, 1539), 16v-17.

⁴⁶⁰ Erasmus, *Hieronymi Stridonensis Vita*, in *Erasmis Opuscula: A Supplement to the Opera Omnia*, ed. by Wallace K. Ferguson (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1933), pp. 125-190 (lines 12-17).

biography. The presence of this criticism individualises the account while simultaneously serving a larger humanist agenda.

Therefore, in identifying Luther's lack of moderation, Melanchthon expresses his subject's individuality and abandons the 'normative...subject' bound by the conventions of the genre. Directly and indirectly, Melanchthon supports Erasmus's criticism of Luther: directly, through the paraphrasing of Erasmus's writings; indirectly, through the adoption of humanist-inspired and Erasmus-endorsed narrative models. In this way, Melanchthon draws on a standard humanist practice of using the form to advertise larger cultural issues.⁴⁶¹

The seemingly negative depiction of Luther, and his intemperate temperament, allows Melanchthon to move beyond the archetypal biography, familiar from classical and Renaissance biography to the life-writing more typical of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century humanists. Fourteenth-century biography developed to show whatever was most individual about a person, not just what was imitable as mediaeval biography had done;⁴⁶² it allowed the biographer to show what had made the subject a specific individual as an 'evocation of individuality'.⁴⁶³ This combination of the typifying, in this instance the ideal scholarly life, with the individual traits allows Melanchthon to use the form to advertise larger cultural issues of the time. Just as Sturm's life of Beatus Rhenanus, for example, offers numerous descriptions of unusually intimate if not negative aspects of his subject's life, including his impotence,⁴⁶⁴ the addition of negative characteristics to the description expresses Luther's individuality. Thus, Melanchthon abandons the 'normative moral instruction and attempt[s] instead to delineate the uniqueness of its subject',⁴⁶⁵ and the *Historia* offers a genuine life of Luther.

The admission of Luther's negative characteristics serves two purposes: first, it depicts a Luther whose character has been divinely equipped to deal with the struggles he encountered during the period after 1517; Melanchthon would have the reader see Luther's very lack of moderation, so criticised by others, as necessary to

⁴⁶¹ For a discussion of these techniques at work elsewhere in humanist writing, see Weiss, 'Sturm', 291 & 296.

⁴⁶² See Jakob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (London: Phaidon, 1995).

⁴⁶³ James M. Weiss, 'The Technique of Faint Praise: Johann Sturm's *Life of Beatus Rhenanus*', *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance: Travaux et Documents*, 43 (Geneva: Droz, 1981), 289-302 (291).

⁴⁶⁴ See Weiss, 'Sturm', 296.

⁴⁶⁵ James M. Weiss, 'The Six Lives of Rudolph Agricola: Forms and Functions of the Humanist Biography', *Humanistica Lovaniensia: Journal of Neo-Latin Studies*, 30 (1981), 19-39 (37).

his challenge of the Roman Church's authority. Secondly, it evokes individuality in a depiction which might otherwise be disregarded as typical of any humanist's biography. Thirdly, and in a way commensurate with Luther's own thinking, the portrayal of this negative characteristic demonstrated how Luther himself was in need of divine forgiveness. Finally, as a by-product of these aims, the portrayal while evoking Luther's individuality lends the narrative a truthfulness which pure encomium would not provide, and reveals Melanchthon's allegiance to Erasmus despite the break between the latter and Luther.

7. Death

Although Melanchthon abandons a chronological narrative in favour of a typological approach in the second half of the *Historia*, he draws his narrative to an end where chronology demands it, namely at Luther's death. The death that Melanchthon depicts, however, does not conform to the narrative expectations of classical, medieval or humanist lives, and suggests once again a clear authorial agenda other than mimesis.

Throughout the first half of the *Historia*, the narrative offered a composition that adhered to the imitable conventions of hagiography: it described Luther's origins, his birth, the gradual revelation of his character through his childhood and his intellectual development in his education. His piety is seen in his adult life, including the years after 1517.⁴⁶⁶ It is, therefore, reasonable to expect the narrative to conform to hagiographical principles in representing Luther's death, and yet Melanchthon avoids any such depiction preferring instead a death scene devoid of any narrative embellishment:

Cumque Filius tuus Dominus noster Ihesus Christus aditurus agonem suum precatus sit pro nobis: Pater, sanctifica eos in veritate, Sermo tuus est veritas. Ad huius nostri Sacerdotis praecationem nostra vota adiungimus, et petimus una cum ipso, ut tua doctrina semper luceat in genere humano, et nos gubernet. Haec quotidie praecantem et Lutherum audiebamus, et inter haec vota anima

⁴⁶⁶ The presence of such clear narrative episodes are easily recognisable and reflect the essential stages of hagiography; see Régis Boyer, 'An Attempt to Define the Typology of Medieval Hagiography', in *Hagiography and Medieval Literature: A Symposium*, ed. by Hans Bekker-Nielsen *i.a.* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1980), pp. 27-33 (p. 17).

eius ex mortali copore placide evocata est, cum iam ageret annum
sexagesimum tertium. (C^v-C^f)

Luther dies calmly during prayer aged 63; the narrative of his death is virtually absent in its lack of detail and is typical of Melanchthon's account, but it is this spare narrative that suggests a classical influence; while Luther dies, a monument to his teaching and piety remains in his writing. The translation of the Bible, praised for its clarity and learning, functions as Luther's miracle and leads the faithful to sources, and true faith kindled. Thus, Luther's life is an example, and how he dies testifies to the truth of this theological thinking.

While the narrative is spare and offers few details, especially in comparison to later accounts,⁴⁶⁷ it presents a death scene consistent with the serene ends of classical biography,⁴⁶⁸ as well as casting Luther as the saint who senses his own death but who continues steadfastly in prayer.⁴⁶⁹ This form was so essential to life writing that it found its way into humanist biography: Erasmus casts Vitrier's end as a peaceful death and one finds the evangelical simplicity of resignation with hope in much of Erasmus's writing.⁴⁷⁰ The serene end is most clearly articulated in the *Funus* in which Cornelius, accepting his prognosis, devotes his remaining life to reading scripture, encouraging others to piety, and in his final moments offers prayers for peace, concord, and piety before dying with a gentle breath.⁴⁷¹ In Beatus Rhenanus's

⁴⁶⁷ See, for example, the treatment of Mathesius, *Historien von des Ehrwürdigen in Gott Seligen thewren Manns Gottes Doctoris Martini Luthers anfang, lehr, leben und sterben* (Nürnberg: Ulrich Neuber, 1566), in Johannes Mathesius: *Ausgewählte Werke*, III, ed. by G. Loesche (Prague: Calwe, 1906).

⁴⁶⁸ Classical life-writing often provides a violent death, as is seen in Plutarch and Suetonius; significantly, however, the victim often welcomes his death or dies quickly, and death is not to be feared but viewed as the right act. In the *Phaedo*, however, classical death is portrayed at its most serene; here, Plato shows the ideal death of Socrates accepting his fate cheerfully, calmly, and bravely.

⁴⁶⁹ The death of St Cuthbert or St Wilfrid serve as classic examples of the gentle deaths of saints; In the *Life of St Cuthbert*, Bede shows the saint sensing his own death but continuing in his worship steadfastly. Cuthbert withdraws from society, and while diseases wrack his body and death conquers him, 'bodily weakness is powerless to impair the spiritual fortitude'. Importantly, Cuthbert's legacy is a prayer for peace and concord; he dies following Mass calmly. Similarly, in the *Life of St Wilfrid*, the saint dies suddenly at prayer peacefully. See *The Age of Bede: Bede's 'Life of St. Cuthbert', Eddius Stephanus' 'Life of Wilfrid' and Other Works*, ed. by D. H. Farmer and trans. by J. F. Webb (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p. 119.

⁴⁷⁰ See the *Shipwreck* and the *Religious Banquet*, *CWE, Colloquies*, v. 39 (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto P., 1997), pp. 344-351.

⁴⁷¹ Erasmus, *The Funeral*, *CWE, Colloquies*, v. 39 (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto P., 1997), pp. 675-763.

life of Erasmus (1540),⁴⁷² we see the death of the humanist; when toward the end of his life; Erasmus puts his affairs in order while suffering from poor health. Attacked by arthritis, he is overcome by infirmity, and language repeats ‘torments’, ‘tormented’, and ‘misfortune’. Nevertheless, the emphasis in death is on calm acceptance before moving on to Erasmus’s literary testimony.

And so dysentery, the fatal misfortune, tormented him, feeble and destitute of strength though entirely sound of mind; and having gradually exalted him, it at last brought death with the greatest calm and acceptance as he implored Christ’s mercy in his final, oft repeated words. He who, when he lived, treated the teaching of Christ with such sincerity, in death received without a doubt a full reward from the highest Judge.⁴⁷³

It is notable that in Rhenanus’s life, Erasmus’s most prized attribute, his mind, remains unaffected. The similarities with Melanchthon’s account are clear, and in this way, the brief depiction of Luther’s death is entirely consistent with classical, hagiographical and humanist life-writing practices while offering an additional aim.

This additional aim is achieved by playing on the composition of hagiographical *vitae* which lead the reader to expect a description of the saint’s translation and miracles following his death; unsurprisingly, the *Historia* as a life of Luther does not offer this. Following the hagiographical model, Melanchthon’s *saint* requires an emphasis and adapting the models of the confessor-saint and the confessor-bishop,⁴⁷⁴ for whose narratives miracles were not necessary, Melanchthon places his emphasis on Luther’s writings and teachings alongside his exemplary death, and the end of Melanchthon’s narrative confirms the data established at the start of the *Historia*, namely Luther’s piety. Luther’s miracles lie in his legacy, succinctly detailed by Melanchthon in language reminiscent of humanist awakenings, ‘in suis scriptis’ and ‘ad fontes deducere’, and this legacy encourages true piety:

⁴⁷² Rhenanus, Beatus, *Opera Omnia Erasmi* (Basel: Froben, 1538-40), vol. 1, preface; the text is in Allen, I, 56-71.

⁴⁷³ Beatus Rhenanus, *Life of Erasmus*, trans. and ed. by James C. Olin, *Christian Humanism and the Reformation: Selected Writings of Erasmus* (Fordham: Fordham Univ. P., 1965; 1987), pp. 47-67 (p. 64). A critical edition of the Latin text by P. S. Allen is in Erasmus, *Opus Epistolarum*, 12 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), I, pp. 56-71.

⁴⁷⁴ For further details, see Boyer, p. 30.

Volebat enim Lutherus non detinere in suis scriptis, sed ad fontes deducere omnium mentes. Ipsam vocem Dei audire nos voluit, hac voluit in multis accendi veram fidem et invocationem, ut Deus vere celebraretur, et multi fierent haeredes vitae aeternae. (Ci^v)

Melanchthon's representation of Luther's death is in part a pious formula, found commonly in sacred biography and contemporary lives,⁴⁷⁵ but significantly exalts a cohesive religious feeling: Luther is the incarnation of the humanist, and here Lutheran ideal, and who in his death performs an exemplary action, namely his steadfast belief in evangelical promises. Thus, Melanchthon's death of Luther expresses an exemplary social model in a way reminiscent of hagiography.⁴⁷⁶ This isolated episode in an otherwise topical narrative becomes outstandingly significant and thereby idealises a model for dying for the pious Protestant. Simultaneously, the stress given to Luther's literary, theological legacy connects with the recurring theme of the necessity of education and study in creating true piety, found throughout the second half of the *Historia*. It is even more significant that such study is only possible, Melanchthon suggests, through and as a result of humanism.

In closing his narrative with the final episode of Luther's chronological life, Melanchthon affirms a hagiographical structure in which Luther's life adopts saintly attributes until his very end. The narrative's composition at this stage cannot escape the suggestion of Luther's status as a saint; as Boyer indicates, the scheme is immutable:

If the hero is not a martyr, martyrdom is obviously omitted; his death, however, must be obligatorily exemplary and accompanied or followed by miracles.

Each class of saint requires an emphasis: the confessor-saint stresses teachings and writings while the confessor-bishop pastoral work and an exemplary death.

The saint struggles all the time. All is known from the start; the narrative

⁴⁷⁵ See, for example, the description of Agricola's death in Johannes Trithemius, *De Scriptoribus Ecclesiasticis* (1494) in which his last moments are described as 'moritur Heydelbergae mente in deum porrectissimus', in Johannes Trithemius, *De Scriptoribus Ecclesiasticis* (Paris: Bertholdus Remboldt & Johannes Parvus, 1512), clxxxix^r.

⁴⁷⁶ See Régis Boyer, 'An Attempt to Define the Typology of Medieval Hagiography', in *Hagiography and Medieval Literature: A Symposium*, ed. by Hans Bekker-Nielsen i.a. (Odense: Odense University Press, 1980), pp. 27-33 (p. 30).

confirms this initial datum: ‘the saint has to manifest the play of God through his own triumph over the adversities he faces’.⁴⁷⁷

Simultaneously, Melanchthon’s death of Luther helps to establish its own narrative trend of the reformer’s end; as Weiss shows, it was usual to assure the reader that reformers had died professing the doctrine they had taught, and thus refute the ‘polemical rumours of death-bed abjurations’.⁴⁷⁸ This emphasis on Luther’s calm end takes up Melanchthon’s promise in the opening lines of the *Historia* to correct rumours surrounding Luther and make the truth known:

Utilis autem esset et privatae ipsius vitae consideratio luculenter scripta, plena enim fuit Exemplorum, quae ad confirmandam pietatem in bonis mentibus profutura essent, et occasionum recitatio, quae posteritatem de multis rebus commonefacere posset, deinde et calumnias refutaret eorum, qui vel incitatum a principibus viris aut aliis, ut labefactaret Episcoporum dignitatem, vel privata ispum cupiditate inflammatum, servitutis Monasticae vincula rupisse fingunt. (Aiiii^r)

In this way, Luther’s death scene sees Melanchthon acknowledge his status as the provider of the authorized version of Luther’s life which will dictate the ‘truth’ for generations to come.

⁴⁷⁷ Boyer, Régis, ‘An Attempt to Define the Typology of Medieval Hagiography’, in *Hagiography and Medieval Literature: A Symposium*, ed. by Hans Bekker-Nielsen *i.a.* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1980), pp. 27-33 (33).

⁴⁷⁸ See James M. Weiss, ‘Erasmus at Luther’s Funeral: Melanchthon’s Commemorations of Luther in 1546’, *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol.16. 1 (1985), 91-114 (113). Compare, for example, the description of death in Simon Grynaeus, *De ... Oecolampedii Obitu*, in Johannes Oecolampidus and Huldreich Zwingli, *Epistolarum Libri IV*, ed. by Theodore Bibliander (Basel: Thomas Platter, 1536), sigs. ?Iv-?3r (“?” is a pagination device); Justus Jonas, Johannes Aurifaber, and Michael Coelius, *Narratio de Morte Reverendi viri D. Martini Lutheri*, ed. by Johannes Pollicarius (Frankfurt/Main: David Zöpfel, David, 1555), sigs. F6r-G8v. The text had previously been printed in German under the title *Vom Christlichen abschied ausz diesem tödtlichen leben, des Ehrwürdigen Herrn D. Martini Lutheri, bericht: durch D. Justum Jonam, M. Michaelen Celium, unnd ander die dabey gewesen, kurtz zusammen gezogen; Item Oratio, uber der Leych D. Martini Luthers gethan durch Philip. Melanchton, verdeutsch durch D. Gaspar Creutziger; Item. Ein Christliche Predig uber der Leych D. Martini Luthers, durch D. Johan Bugenhagen Pomern* (Nürnberg: Johann vom Berg and Ulrich Neuber, 1546).

8. Concluding Remarks

In writing Luther's life in 1546, no real precedent existed for the biographer of a reformer who, however accepted by his supporters, was viewed by the majority as a heretic; where earlier attempts at reform had taken place, the sixteenth-century reformers had quickly been labelled heretical. As such, Melanchthon relied on a variety of classical, mediaeval, and hagiographical forms to provide a narrative of Luther's life.

The reader cannot escape the hagiographical representation of Luther in the *Historia*, and while the veneration of saints *per se* was devalued in the official doctrine of the reformed church,⁴⁷⁹ the depiction is in concord with Lutheran as well as Luther's own thinking which acknowledged the value of saints' lives in the instruction and encouragement of people.⁴⁸⁰ Thus, the *Historia* reflects Italian and later German typological biography in identifying Luther as the most recent example of church reformers, patriarchs, prophets.⁴⁸¹ Elsewhere, in his seven lives of the saints, Melanchthon portrays a Church riddled with internal dissent and external persecution; in praising the early church father's polemical treatises, he upholds a 'model of churchman persevering in truth ...crucial for the audience of students at Wittenberg who were soon to be pastors in a world darkened by religious and doctrinal controversy';⁴⁸² it is precisely in this mould that Melanchthon casts Luther. Thus, for early Lutherans, church history developed into a history of doctrine rather

⁴⁷⁹ See Article 21 of the Augsburg Confession, drafted by Melanchthon *inter alia* in 1530, in J. M. Reu, ed., *The Augsburg Confession: A Collection of Sources* (St Louis: Concordia Seminary P., 1966); the Latin text is available in *CR*, 28, pp. 92-95. For a discussion of the role of the saints in Lutheran theology, see Peter Manns, 'Die Heiligenverehrung nach CA 21', in *Confessio Augustana und confutation: Der Augsburger Reichstag 150 und die Einheit der Kirche*, ed. by Erwin Iserloh und Barbara Hallesleben (Münster: Aschendorff, 1980), pp. 596-640.

⁴⁸⁰ Luther endorsed such works through prefatory writings while indicating his cautious attitude through the call for guidelines on their use: see Georg Spalatin, *Magnifice Consolatoria exempla...* (Wittenberg: Nicolaus Schirlent, 1544); Luther's preface is given in *WA*, 54, 112-115; see also Georg Major's edition of the *Vitae Patrum* (Wittenberg: Petrus Seitz, 1544); the preface is to be found in *WA*, 54, 107-111.

⁴⁸¹ See James M. Weiss, 'Beyond Individuality: Varieties of Biography during the Italian Renaissance: Individuality and Beyond', in *Cultural Visions: Essays in the History of Culture presented to Karl Weintraub*, ed. by P. Schine Gold and B. C. Sax (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), pp. 25-40 (pp. 34).

⁴⁸² James M. Weiss, 'Luther and his Colleagues on the Lives of the Saints', *Harvard Library Bulletin* 33 (1985) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. P., 1985), 174-195 (192).

than an institutional history, which may explain concentration on the development and defence of Luther's thought in the *Historia*.⁴⁸³

The adoption of a clearly Plutarchan scheme detailing the chronology of Luther's progression through education and early career allows Melanchthon to establish the primary influences on his subject, before pursuing a topical narrative with a thematic order by fields of achievement and character traits. This is a standard biographical approach adopted and used elsewhere by Melanchthon,⁴⁸⁴ which enables him to address aims and to focus on key aspects other than merely recounting the details of his subject's life.

Melanchthon's account is of course far from disinterested, although the text is largely bound by an understanding of the truth; as with any biography, it provides a good example as to how one should live one's life, and as the preface to Luther's works, the biography was intended for a large readership familiar with the reformer's life and works. However, by avoiding certain questions and emphasising specific aspects of Luther's life, Melanchthon provides a model of the good, Lutheran life in which a thorough humanist education is central to the development of proper religion. Indeed, as the narrative develops, the purpose of the biography becomes more apparent in its focus on a larger issue involved in the subject's life, namely this relationship of humanism to religion, and thus adopts a standard trope of humanist biography in which the text was rarely about the subject alone. This practice was particularly common to German-speaking humanist biography but had its roots in Italian humanist biography of the preceding century, from which the genre acquired its apologetic purpose, that is to say biographies 'whose data and themes were vehicles to address some larger debate of the day'.⁴⁸⁵ As Weiss makes clear, 'by accentuating one detail over others, by judicious praise or blame, and by the

⁴⁸³ See Peter Meinold, *Geschichte der kirklichen Hagiographie*, 2 vols (Freiburg/Munich: Alber, 1967).

⁴⁸⁴ The narrative of Melanchthon's other lives is similarly constructed with details of academic progress, teachers and schools, works read and written, astrological configuration at birth all present; see, for example, Melanchthon's lives of Erasmus, Reuchlin, and Agricola, in *Oratio de Erasmo Roterodamo*, CR, XII, 265-271; for Reuchlin, see CR, XI, 990-1010; Agricola, see CR, III, 673-676; Cruciger, CR, XI, 833-841; Schurf, CR, XII, 86-94; and Bugenhagen, CR, XII, 29-307. For a survey of these works, see James M. Weiss, 'Melanchthon and the heritage of Erasmus: *Oratio de puritate doctrinae* (1536) and *Oratio de Erasmo Roterodame* (1557)', in *Actes du Colloque international Erasme* (Tours, 1986), ed. by J. Chomarat, A. Godin, and J.-C. Margolin, Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance, 239 (Geneva: Droz, 1990), 293-306.

⁴⁸⁵ See James M. Weiss, 'Varieties of Biography during the Italian Renaissance: Individuality and Beyond', in *Cultural Visions: Essays in the History of Culture presented to Karl Weintraub*, ed. by P. Schine Gold and B. C. Sax (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), pp. 2-40 (pp. 31-32).

effective citation of the subject's own works, a biographer could portray his subject as the living resolution of issues about which a dialogue or treatise could present only abstract conclusions'.⁴⁸⁶ Developing the theme, Melanchthon shows that Luther does not in fact present the ideal resolution, but had his character been so formed by humanism, it would have done so, and thus humanism presents the ideal resolution.

The *Historia* is thus not just about Luther; it serves wider purposes of exemplarity and offers a paradigm for emulation in a rapidly-changing society and religious context. Melanchthon shows the best qualities of his subject so that others can extract them from Luther's context and reproduce them in their own. However, Melanchthon, the close personal friend and admirer, does offer a personal portrait of Luther that conforms to standard representations but this is one which admits faults so that he does provide an individual biography. Anecdote helps to explain Luther's singularity, and the individual aspects of Luther's portrayal are a consequence of the close relationship between biographer and subject. The inclusion of 'transgressive individuality' depicts behaviours that contravene Melanchthon's humanist norms but which are inseparable from Luther's character,⁴⁸⁷ and points the way to an argument for the expansion of humanism within Lutheran culture. In so doing, the text promotes a collective Lutheran identity by moving away from a simple list of works and deeds to its concentration on personality and person; the focus for Melanchthon is indeed Luther but in a way which will serve his greater educational and religious reforms.

Therefore, the *Historia* vindicates Melanchthon's humanistic reform programme,⁴⁸⁸ while attempting to redirect church reform along more peaceful lines.⁴⁸⁹ It marks the advent of humanism as enriching education and purifying religion, and identified the mutual beneficial relationship between humanism and

⁴⁸⁶ James M. Weiss, 'The Six Lives of Rudolph Agricola: Form and Functions of Humanist Biography', *Humanistica Lovaniensia: Journal of Neo-Latin Studies*, vol. 30 (1981), 19-39 (39).

⁴⁸⁷ For further information on his term, see James M. Weiss, 'An Introduction to Biography in Renaissance Italy and Reformation Germany', in *Humanist Biography in Renaissance Italy and Reformation Germany* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 1-68.

⁴⁸⁸ See James M. Weiss, 'Kennst du das Land wo die Humanisten blühen? References to Italy in the Biographies of German Humanists', in *Germania Latina Latinitas: Politik, Wissenschaft, Humanistische Kultur vom späten Mittelalter bis in unsere Zeit*, 2 vols, ed. by E. Kessler and H. C. Kuhn (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2003), I, pp. 439-455 (p.439).

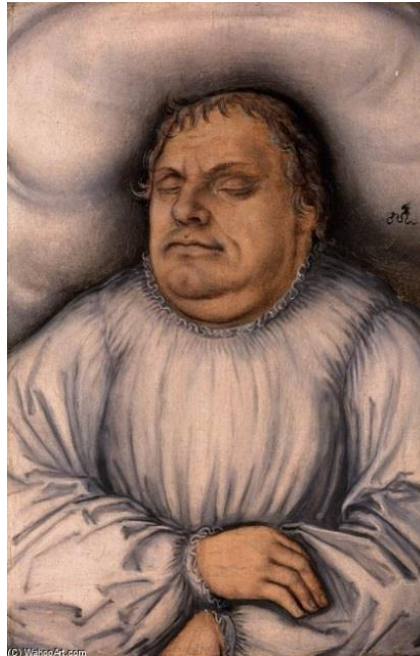
⁴⁸⁹ James M. Weiss, 'Kennst du...', p. 446.

reform, the former preparing the way for the latter.⁴⁹⁰ In this way, Melanchthon places his mentor and model, Erasmus and Luther, in concord. This subtle suggestion, hidden beneath the text of Luther's life, hints at the importance of humanist education to the Lutheran party throughout the next two hundred years, and is purely a product of Melanchthon's hand.

⁴⁹⁰ This theme was adopted by Camerarius in his biography of Melanchthon; see Joachim Camerarius, *De Vita Philippi Melanchthonis narratio* (Leipzig: Ernest Voegelin, 1566), ed. by G. T. Strobel (Halle: Gebauer, 1777).

Chapter Seven:

Conclusion



Even before Luther achieved notoriety, artists had begun to capture his image and over the course of his life, Luther stimulated an innovative period of iconographic themes.⁴⁹¹ The earliest of these images depict Luther with a degree of obvious continuity as a friar, in an Augustinian habit, in his doctoral cap, as a teacher of the Word, or teaching with Bible in hand. The unifying theme to all these images is that they testify to Luther's true belief and his status as a prophet both in terms of the images' own semiotics as well as by drawing on orthodox iconography of images of St Thomas Aquinas, Gregory the Great, and other leading figures of ecclesiastical history and hagiography.⁴⁹² It is significant, however, that from the moment of his likeness first being captured, Luther is seen largely in the same way, with subsequent generations and centuries adding little or nothing to a complex sixteenth-century representation of Luther as a man of God and divine instrument.

⁴⁹¹ For an assessment of Cranach's contribution to Lutheran iconography, see Charles L. Kuhn, 'The Mairhauser Epitaph: an Example of Late Sixteenth-Century Lutheran Iconography', *The Art Bulletin*, 58.4 (Dec. 1976), 542-546 (p. 542).

⁴⁹² See R. W. Scribner, 'Incombustible Luther: The Image of the Reformer in Early Modern Germany', *Past and Present*, 110 (198), 38-68.

This harmonious image of the Reformer may be ascribed to the fact that all portraits for which Luther actually sat were the product of either Lucas Cranach the Elder or, his son, Lucas Cranach the Younger.⁴⁹³ The Cranachs were to become close neighbours to the Luthers, the father having been a witness at the latter's wedding and Luther acting as godfather to the eldest Cranach daughter, and both Cranachs were acknowledged supporters of Reform. Whatever the exact nature of the Cranach-Luther relationship, no other artists were permitted access to Luther and were forced instead to work from the Cranachs' woodcuts, engravings, and sketches to produce an image of Luther.⁴⁹⁴

While it is true that each artist sees his subject in an individual and personal way, there is no reason to assume that either Cranach distorted his image of the Reformer, and given their unique access to Luther, the manner in which father and son saw him and reproduced his image has shaped the visual representation of Luther from the contemporary period to the present day. Thus, how we see Luther essentially replicates an image and understanding given to subsequent artists and to us by the Cranachs. Therefore, the Wittenberg studio has dictated the visual reception of Luther with Cranach's serpentine signet authorizing the accuracy of what we see. In the same way that Wittenberg shaped the reformer's visual image, through the closely controlled work of the Cranach studio, so too has Melancthon authorised our understanding of Luther's life through the *Historia*, and so too may we trace his signature in subsequent narrative representations.

In accepting the narrative influence of Melancthon's *Historia* in a way analogous to the Cranach images, an identification of the model and origins of the text adopts a greater significance. Despite the existence of heretics and other reforming figures before 1517, clear narrative models did not exist for the depiction of lives such as Luther's. In composing his *Historia*, Melancthon drew on a variety of sources to present his friend at the heart of the orthodox tradition by means of

⁴⁹³ On the development of images of Luther, see Johannes Ficker, *Älteste Bildnisse Luthers*, Sonderausdruck aus der Zeitschrift des Vereins für Kirchengeschichte der Provinz Sachsen (Magdeburg: Kommissionsverlag evangelische Buchhandlung, 1920), and 'Die Bildnisse Luthers aus der Zeit seines Lebens', *Luther Jahrbuch* (1934), 103-69. Scribner provides an excellent overview of the depiction of Luther in *For the Sake of Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation* (Cambridge: CUP, 1981). See also O. Thulin, 'Das Luther Bild der Gegenwart', *Luther Jahrbuch* (1941), 123-48, and Martin Warnke, *Cranachs Luther: Entwürfe für ein Image* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1984).

⁴⁹⁴ For a discussion of the Luther-Cranach relationship, see Joseph Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image* (London: Reaktion, 2004), pp. 76-78.

direct statement, literary motifs, plot structure, and lexis; for a leading humanist and Hellenist, the obvious origins of such devices were to be found in biblical, classical and mediaeval lives of the utmost orthodoxy.

The historical concern with purity and continuity of dogma is central to ecclesiastical history, and reflects the tradition started with Eusebius; Melanchthon's casting of Luther as a re-discoverer and restorer of purity maintains this tradition. The concept of a pure church corrupted adopts a well-established theme of earlier heterodox writings, subsequently picked up by Reformers and Humanists, despite the latter's antipathy to the ill-educated heretics of the past, to demonstrate how Christ's promise to remain with his Church is true. In the *Historia*, Luther personifies Protestant dogma, and Melanchthon's concern to ensure the reader knows what Luther fought for is apparent throughout so that the reader appreciates the necessity of the struggle carried by the first reformers. Moreover, the introduction to this thesis established the rise in nationalism as the background to the Reformation, which manifested itself in the German-speaking literary tradition in a desire for a unifying hero to represent German qualities against Roman decadence. Melanchthon's *Historia* is clearly a product of this cultural development and seeks to emphasise Luther's German qualities in contrast to his Roman counterparts.

Faced with the challenge of depicting the arch-heretic, Melanchthon drew on both biblical biographical narratives as well as classical life-writing in his search for a suitable narrative model. As the analysis of the *Historia*'s broad genre demonstrated, Burridge's methodology establishes a connection between the external features of Melanchthon's text and βίοι as well as the Gospels which highlights the adoption of pre-existing plot structures which subtextually seeks to legitimise Luther's life and actions by anchoring him in an orthodox narrative of classical lives and religious life-writing. Generic tropes locate Luther firmly as a figure from ecclesiastical history and classical philosophy, so that the reader accepts Luther's orthodox credentials. Rather than simply narrate his life in the context of events, Melanchthon demonstrates how Luther's personality brought events forward and, in turn, drove history. Melanchthon's account thus conforms to sixteenth-century biographical standards, while seeking to offer Luther as an exemplum as well as explore the events of the Reformation through his life.

Chapter 3 explored key aspects of Melanchthon's style in both his attitude toward 'facts' as well as his selective approach to key episodes in Luther's

childhood; these questions highlight the problematical nature of the memorial process in which the creative element is always present, and which undermines notions of historical truth. The act of rectification buried in the simple statements regarding Luther's birth challenge fundamentally the veracity of Melanchthon's highly influential *Historia* while equally demonstrating the fictional nature of biographical writing. This deliberate act of constructing past episodes is at its most obvious when dealing with the unknown, as in Luther's childhood which required Melanchthon once again to draw on existing models of life-writing; by identifying the combination of hagiographical, classical, and humanist tropes, Luther emerges with the attributes of the child-saint of hagiography and with the talents and interests of the humanist scholar. In turn, this depiction initiates arguably the major theme of the *Historia*, the necessity of humanism to good religion which enables Luther to achieve the theological enlightenment which later results in his Reformation breakthrough. Melanchthon's Luther is an Old Testament prophet but he is a divine instrument whose classical learning allows him to recognise the true light. By investing his text with such tropes, Melanchthon creates a narrative structure drawn from classical βίαι which casts Luther in the tradition of the master-narratives of Christian lives, while correcting inconvenient aspects of Luther's past to conform to his overall interpretative aim. Thus, historical legitimation is achieved through a creative process of selection, rectification, and adoption. It is through the invention of such 'facts' and their episodic emplotment that Melanchthon the author creates a discernible form to his story of Luther's life with a beginning, middle, and end.

As chapter 4 indicates, Melanchthon's treatment of the monastic period allows Luther to discover his reformer's vocation in a way reminiscent of humanist scholars' biographies. As a divine agent, characterization is suitably static but the focus remains on the development of Luther's theological writings and thinking, cast in the idiom of the humanist recovery of eloquence, and suggests that the new learning is an essential aspect of true religious belief. By examining the text's plot structure, Melanchthon is shown to adopt the romantic quest narrative, in which Luther's character was revealed in youth, is now ready to face the challenges and tests of adulthood. The use of a chronological narrative supports the emplotment of this period in Luther's life in a romantic plot structure which supports the concept of developmental experiences which lead ultimately to his Reformation act in the posting of the Ninety-Five Theses. The subsequent abandonment of the chronicle

allows Melanchthon not only to economize his narrative, but also to focus in greater depth on those aspects of greater importance to the overall interpretative aim of the text. Again, this flexible approach to narrative structure conforms entirely with both sixteenth-century life-writing practices as well as those found in inherited models, and, significantly, this romantic emplotment requires and receives the return to the just society the genre demands.

Alongside the episode of Luther's birth, the narrative of the posting of the Ninety-Five Theses shows Melanchthon at his most creative and influential. The authoritative description offered by Melanchthon has shaped popular memory of this supposed event, and has repeatedly been cast both in words and images in the terms offered by Luther's closest supporter. The deliberate and singulative act present in the *Historia* has become crucial to an understanding of Luther's attitude toward reform itself; it is interesting to compare here the earlier Roman Church's desire to see its institutional foundation as the Imperial Church fabricated at the Donation of Constantine with Melanchthon's fixing of the Reformation's birth in 1517. The seemingly simple representation belies a complex passage which draws on a variety of rhetorical strategies to persuade the reader not only of Luther's act but of the justness of that stance, captured in the image of Luther hammering his theses to the Castle Church door on 31 October 1517. This scene is the culmination of Luther's development and preparation seen in his childhood and years in the cloister, and one which Melanchthon would have us regard as a necessary and essential reaction to the abuses of the contemporary Roman Church. It is here that Luther intervenes in ecclesiastical history and seeks to return the Church to her original purity, and it is this interpretation present in the *Historia* that has been adopted by virtually all subsequent accounts of the Reformation. The memorialising of Luther's act, drawn from Melanchthon's narrative, in the various Reformation celebrations since 1617 and which are to reach their zenith in 2017,⁴⁹⁵ have their origins in the short episode in the *Historia*. Moreover, it shows how the fictional and distinctly narrative-historical understanding enters into popular consciousness to create an orthodox celebration of an event which may not have taken place.

As Chapter 6 establishes, the *Historia*'s relationship with classical and Renaissance biographical writing is apparent in casting Luther as an exemplary

⁴⁹⁵ For details of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation to be held in 2017, see <<http://www.luther2017.de/>> [last accessed 10 December 2013].

paradigm; the chronological representation of Luther's life until 1517 allows Melanchthon to establish various significant influences on Luther, of which a certain humanist education appears dominant, as well as inherent character traits that are shown to be necessary to his status as a latter-day prophet of the true Church. This depiction is entirely in line with the Plutarchan narrative model but from the episode of the nailing of the Ninety-Five Theses, in fact the midpoint in the text, Melanchthon shifts to a Suetonian topical narrative to assess Luther's major achievements in his lifetime, and ultimately legacy to the Lutheran movement. This shift in narrative structure neatly allows Melanchthon to avoid inconvenient aspects of Luther's life which might otherwise with his depiction of the model of the exemplary Luther and the model Lutheran.

Throughout the *Historia*, the use of hagiographical tropes in his representation has invested Luther lexically and semiotically with the attributes of the saint, and in the narrative of his life after 1517, this depiction concludes that Luther was the latest figure in a long line of witnesses to the true faith; as was made clear, this depiction does not contradict Lutheran doctrine on the veneration of the saints, but emphasises the importance of appropriate models of faith in a world of doctrinal controversy. By drawing on the language of hagiography, Melanchthon establishes a means of depicting the model churchman as examples of reformed theology; this is all the more important given the *Historia*'s emphasis on historical orthodoxy and purity of Lutheran doctrine against the backdrop of a historically corrupted institutional church.

Moreover, the analysis in Chapter 6 also demonstrated that the *Historia* serves a wider purpose than merely representing a life of Luther and, as such, is entirely in accordance with the biographical tradition, particularly from the German humanist tradition. The repeated emphasis, both direct and implicit, reaches its apotheosis in the depiction of Luther's life after 1515; through selection, omission, and accentuation of various data of Luther's life, Melanchthon uses the *Historia* as the vehicle to present humanism as essential to the development of true religion. The transgressive individuality of his personality, visible in his lack of moderation, shows Luther preventing the standard humanist trope of the ideal resolution; however, Melanchthon develops this theme to indicate that it is precisely a combination of Luther's character alongside the virtue of moderation, so clearly depicted in Luther's achievements and failings, that makes this resolution visible,

and the argument for humanism more forceful. In this way, the text shows how a historical narrative may acquire a contemporary significance; the figure of Luther illustrates not only the events of the immediate past but also provides a paradigm of true faith and learning for the future, while simultaneously expressing a patriotic response to Roman decadence. Thus, the *Historia*'s call for the expansion of humanism seeks to promote a collective Lutheran identity that would endure for centuries.

The copper engraving that opens chapter 4 shows Luther with tonsure in the habit of an Augustinian friar is said to be the first artistic impression of the younger Reformer; the portrait shows Luther as a 'muscular, steely-eyed, angry monk' and has undergone slight variations over time and has inspired countless subsequent representations to become a classic.⁴⁹⁶ In its original form, the engraving carries the inscription '[a]etherna ipse suae mentis simulachra Lutherus exprimit. At vultus cera Lucae Occiduos', in which Cranach accepts ownership for the graphic representation of his subject while assigning to Luther responsibility for the expression of a true portrait of his soul. The implication of this inscription is that although Luther's reflections may be eternal, the piece of paper, its subject, and its artist will all pass away. Just as Cranach's influence itself is analogous, this study of the *Historia* has shown how significant Melanchthon's handling of Luther's legacy is to the outward and visible understanding of Luther; it is he who has determined what the key episodes in Luther's life are, not only identifying and selecting these from the available historical data but, where necessary, creating these from scant facts or plotting them in a discernible narrative to support far more complex philosophical agenda. There can be few, if any, accounts of Luther's life in the last 500 years that have not inherited some influence that carries Melanchthon's creative imprimatur.

⁴⁹⁶ Ozment provides a useful summary of the early images of Luther by Cranach; as he indicates, this first 1520 engraving was inspired by an earlier image of Cardinal Albrecht of Brandenburg by Dürer from 1519. Regrettably, Frederick the Wise was unable to authorise Cranach's first depiction of Luther feeling it to show too much of Luther's defiance at a time when Frederick's negotiations with the emperor called for a more pliable, spiritual leader on whom politicians could rely. Thus, the engraving was quickly softened by placing Luther in the traditional saint's niche with an open Bible in hand; Hans Baldung Grien softened the harsh Reformer further through the addition of a halo. See Steven Ozment, 'Marketing Luther', in *The Serpent and the Lamb: Cranach, Luther, and the Making of the Reformation* (New Haven: Yale Univ. P., 2011), pp. 119-141 (p. 126).

The humanist dictum *ad fontes*,⁴⁹⁷ so familiar to Melanchthon, calls for a retrogression to the original sources in search of clarity and enlightenment; in returning to the classical, biblical, and medieval sources of the text, this thesis has established the narrative models that inspired Melanchthon's work, and revealed the author's hand in his attempt to place Luther lexically, narratively, and semiotically in an orthodox tradition while also demonstrating the development of a distinctly historical consciousness that sought to understand Luther both in terms of his position in history but, more importantly, how he wrote history. In this way, the *Historia* fulfils the contemporary aims of biography and presents not just 'a handbook of the German Reformation',⁴⁹⁸ but provides a lasting and durable image of the Reformer that has become the master-narrative of the *Lutherbild*, and, importantly, shows how history's claim of truth is ultimately at the mercy of fictional narrative.

⁴⁹⁷ The exact origin of the phrase is difficult to determine; it appears in Psalm 42 of the Vulgate, 'quemadmodum desiderat cervus ad fontes aquarum ita desiderat anima mea ad te Deus', while Godamer cites that it was adopted from there by Spanish humanists. See Hans-Georg Godamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. by Joel Weisheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1975; 1989), p. 502. Erasmus encouraged his readers to hasten to classical sources, '[s]ed in primis ad fontes ipsos properandum, id est graecos et antiquos', in, 'De ratione studii ac legendi interpretandique auctores' (Paris: Biermant, 1511), in *Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami Opera omnia*, ed. by J. H. Waszink i. a., (Amsterdam: North Holland, 1971), I (2), 79-151.

⁴⁹⁸ Backus, *Life Writing*, p. 5.

Bibliography

Abbreviations

Periodicals, series, and frequently cited titles referred to by abbreviated titles.

- ADB* *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, ed. by Historische Commission bei der königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Bayern), 6 vols (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 187-1912).
- ARG* *Archiv für Refomationsgeschichte*
- CMG* *Corpus medicorum Graecorum*, ed. by Johannes Mewaldt, Karl Deichgräber, Konrad Schubring, Jutta Kollesch, Diethard Nickel, Christian Brockmann, and Roland Wittwer, 34 vols (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1991-); available on-line at <http://cmg.bbaw.de/> [last accessed 5 Deceber 2013].
- CR* Melanchthon, Philip, *Corpus Reformatorum: Philippi Melanthonis opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. by K. G. Bretschneider and H. E. Bindseil, 28 vols (Halle: Schwetschke, 1834-60).
- CWE* *Collected Works of Erasmus*, ed. by Alexander Dalzell and others, 86 vols (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto P., 1974-)
- JMH* *The Journal of Modern History*
- MSA* Melanchthon, Philip, *Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl [Studienausgabe]*, ed. by Robet Stupperich *et al*, 7 vols (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1951-1975).

- VD16** *Verzeichnis der im deutschen Sprachbereich erschienen Drucke des XVI. Jahrhunderts*, hrsg. Von der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek in München in Verbindung mit der Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel (Stuttgart: Hierseemann, 1983-).
- VD16 online** <http://www.bsb-muenchen.de/16-Jahrhundert-VD-16.180.0.html?L=3>
- WA** Luther, Martin, *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Weimarer Ausgabe)*, 67 vols (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883-).
- WABr.** Luther, Martin, *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Weimarer Ausgabe), Briefe*, 18 vols (Weimar: Böhlau, 1930-1985).
- WATr.** Luther, Martin, *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Weimarer Ausgabe), Tischreden*, 6 vols (Weimar: Böhlau, 1912-21).
- WUNT** *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament*

Melanchthon's *Historia de vita et actis Reverendiss. viri D. Mart. Lutheri*

The first published version of the *Historia* is found as a preface to the second volume of the Wittenberg edition of Luther's works in, *Operum Omnium Martini Lutheri* (Wittenberg: Johannes Lufft, 1546); it first appeared in its own right in the 1548 pamphlet by Pollicarius, and it is this 1548 version which has been used as the basis of analysis.

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